LIFE OF ST. GERLACH

F. A. HOUCK

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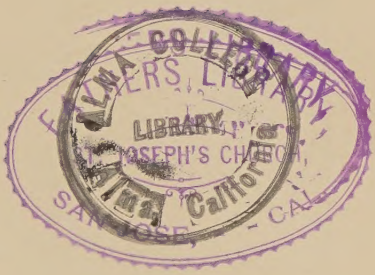
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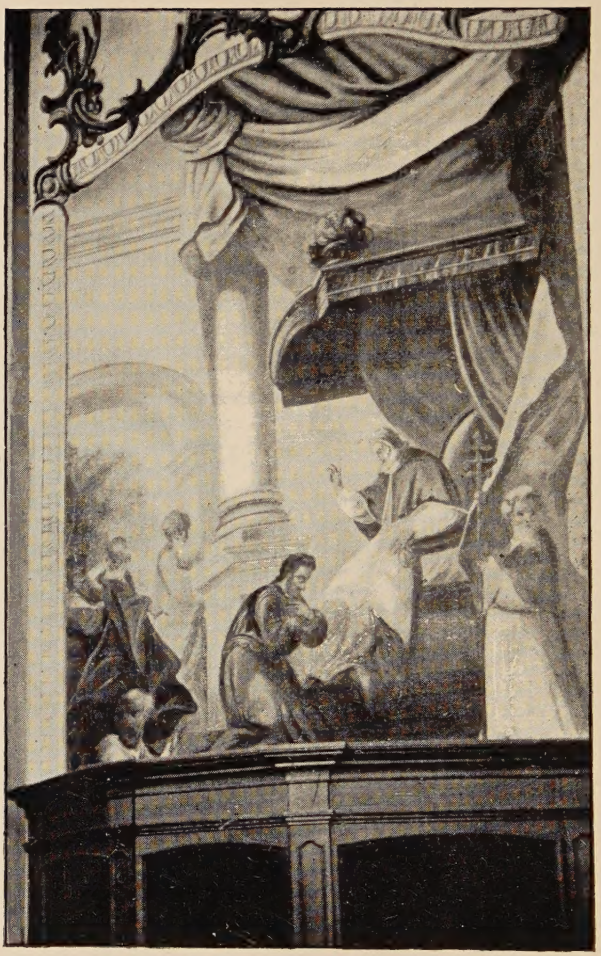

KNIGHT GERLACH THROWS HIMSELF AT THE FEET OF HIS HOLINESS POPE EUGENE III.

THE LIFE

OF

SAINT GERLACH.

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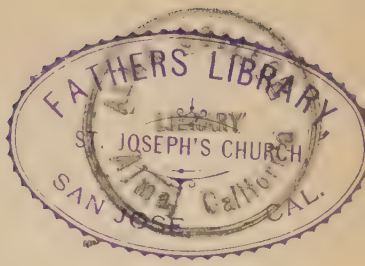

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PREFACE.

THE Sacred Scriptures frequently exhort us to "praise God according to the multitude of His greatness." Nowhere, perhaps, in the entire universe does this Divine greatness appear with such clearness, variety, and attractiveness as in the lives of the Saints. For, they are the greatest heroes of which mankind can boast, the moral giants of the human race, the most perfect images of Almighty God that have ever inhabited the globe. Hence, there is surely no need of an apology for introducing a Saint to a portion of the Christian world, whose words and actions, like precious gems, need but be brought to light in order to reflect their effulgent beauty.

The present Life is based chiefly on two biographies of St. Gerlach, which are quoted by the Bollandists under "January 5th," pp. 304—322. The larger and more accurate of the two, "'Vita Sancti Gerlaci,' ab Anonymo Ordinis Praemonstratensis Sacerdote in S^i Gerlaci Monasterio commorante," was written within fifty years after the death of the Saint. Whether the author was a contemporary of St. Gerlach is not certain; he frequently, however, introduces the testimony of contemporaries with whom he had spoken. Besides having the authority of an eye-witness to many of the miraculous events he narrates, his veracity is highly

recommended by the habit* which he wore. The other Life bears the title, "'Vita Sancti Gerlaci,' Auctore Guilhelmo Cripio."

Besides these two trustworthy documents in the Latin tongue, there are a number of Lives of St. Gerlach extant which are written in diverse languages. The biography published in the Dutch language, by Father Voncken, in the year 1886, "Het Leven van den heiligen Gerlacus, Kluizenaar"; one in the German language, by Franz Wesselmann, in the year 1897; "Der heilige Gerlach von Houthem," and a number of other Lives have been consulted.

Hoping that the perusal of this account of an eventful and edifying life may be the occasion for many of seeking and obtaining the powerful aid of St. Gerlach, the author takes pleasure in placing it into the English reader's hands.

F. A. H.

* *Cf.* Bollandists, Vol. I., p. 319, footnote to chap. xxviii.

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PART I.

GERLACH, A KNIGHT OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE OF THE GERMAN NATION.

CHAPTER I.

A BRIEF SKETCH OF THE TIMES IN WHICH ST. GERLACH LIVED.

The life of St. Gerlach falls within the period of the Holy Roman Empire's history when the Christian faith was professed by well-nigh all the nations within its boundaries. The seed of the Gospel, sown by Saints Eucharius, Maternus, Servatius, Fridolin, Gall, Emmeran, and, later, by St. Boniface, to whom Pope Zachary wrote in the year 748 "that he lifted up his hands in gratitude to God for his immense success," had sprung up and brought forth abundant fruit. The apostolic labours of the missionaries who had come to Germany from Ireland, Scotland, and England, were being blessed with unusual results. Accompanied by a number of nuns, these heralds of Christianity had brought the blessings of peace to the Teutonic nations who were constantly engaged in feuds and warfare. Convents were established in wild and barren stretches! Self-sacrificing religious introduced the arts and sciences, and shed the light of their great erudition, as well as of their virtue, upon these barbarous children of nature. Already at the beginning of the ninth century the dioceses of Tongres, Cologne, Worms, Spire, and Utrecht were in a flourishing condition, and intimately united through the Archbishop of Mentz with the See of Rome. From the time of the subjugation of the obstinate Saxons under Charles the

Great Christianity had made rapid progress in the German Empire, which, at the time of Gerlach, included the German Empire of to day, together with the greater portion of Italy, Sardinia, Corsica, Austria, Switzerland, Eastern France, and the Netherlands.

The influence of the one true Church had consequently become far-reaching, and manifested itself in the deep faith which characterises the Middle Ages and the noble edifices reared to the glory of God. Not the least striking feature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries is the salutary influence of the Church on mediæval chivalry.

The repeated incursions of the Hungarians and Slavonians, as also the Roman expeditions of the German emperors, had given rise to a well-equipped standing army of cavalry men. The necessity of horse soldiers for the protection of the country had constantly increased from the time of the disruption of Charlemagne's Empire. Perhaps the chief reason, however, for introducing this institution was the absence of a strong central power. The principalities, counties, and fiefs were continually contending among themselves for the ascendency. Very often, too, there existed no other means of avenging a wrong, or of protecting oneself against a powerful neighbour, than to go to war. Thus the defence of a certain district naturally devolved upon the largest landowners, who were commonly of the nobility. In the course of time a tax, called the "Heerschilling," was allotted to these liege lords and knights as a recompense for the protection they provided.

The influence gained by the nobility, especially by those who were liege lords to a large number of vassals,

grew from year to year. Not always, however, did they use the power entrusted to them to the benefit of others, but greed for gain, or ambition for renown, were often the cause of frays and feuds. Another feature of knighthood, which led to frequent abuses and excesses, was a desire to excel in combat and hazardous enterprises. This tendency gave birth to the tournaments* at which the laws of equity and justice were often disregarded. The recklessness and injustice of many knights in the course of time became proverbial. It was then that the Church strove to elevate and direct what was noble in the chivalrous spirit of the age.

She held up Christ as the ideal of knighthood, and taught that His cause was the most worthy to engage its valour and courage. The Church held up the Immaculate Mother of God as the fairest type of womanhood, and the defence of her honour as a worthy object of the Christian knight's ambition. The Church it was, finally, that taught the mediæval knight to behold his brother, yea, his Lord and Redeemer, in the poor and downtrodden of this world, and to champion their cause for justice's sake. For this noble service in the interest of humanity she blessed his sword and bade him wield it in the name of God!

Inspired with the high ideal which the Church held up to chivalry, every Christian knight deemed it an honour to take part in the Crusades. They were not a "fanatical and hot-headed enterprise," but a necessity of the age, inspired by the noblest spirit of knighthood.

* The tournament of the Middle Ages was first introduced by the French in the eleventh century. In Germany the first seems to have taken place at Wuerzburg, in 1127.

The crying injustice of the infidel Turks against pilgrims who visited the Holy Land roused the laudable anger of every one who possessed any sense of justice. Even at that early date "the Turks were the great Antichrist among the races of men."* Hence the Greek emperors and the Popes called upon Christendom to send an army to Palestine, and remove those bitter enemies of the Cross and their idolatrous practices from the holy Sepulchre of Christ.

In the year 1095 Pope Urban II. exhorted all Europe to take up arms against the common enemy. He had hardly finished an address at the Council of Clermont, calling upon the Christian world to go forth against the powerful foe and conquer the Holy Land, when the cry, "God wills it" arose from the enthusiastic multitude! Like a prairie fire the call to arms spread over Europe and inflamed the heart of every Christian. United "in that faith which maketh souls acceptable to God," Christian Europe rose like one man! Thousands assembled from all points of the compass, determined to put an end to the desecrations of the infidel Turks in the places sanctified by the Precious Blood of the Redeemer! "Feudal distinctions were forgotten in the enthusiasm of a service which transcended in its aims all earthly duties. The power of the feudal nobility became, for the time being, secondary to that of the Church. Men were summoned no longer to the service of their feudal lords, but to the service of the Church. King, baron, burgher, and peasant found himself side by side in the same great cause, comrades-in-arms in an

* Newman.

enterprise which addressed what was common and eternal in them all, rather than what was distinctive and conventional."*

Though these outpourings of Christendom did not attain the permanent results which the Christian world had aimed at, yet those which were secured, beyond doubt, were of a most beneficial nature. It is difficult to say what would have been the fate of Europe had not the Crusaders gone forth to check a formidable enemy. In all probability it would have experienced the same fate as Greece and Palestine. The Crusades were a necessary means of defence, as well as a just war of conquest. True, deeds of rapine and cruelty blot the career of some few Crusaders, but never in the history of man has a war been carried on in which greater self-sacrifice, manly bearing, and Christian fortitude have been displayed.

The advantages, moreover, were many and far-reaching. Besides nourishing the noblest spirit of chivalry, the Crusades gave a powerful impetus to literature, and promoted in no small degree the sciences of geography, history, and medicine. It is largely to the Crusades that Europe owed its transcendent progress in the arts of navigation and shipbuilding in the Middle Ages. Michaud† even affirms that the commercial enterprises fostered by these holy wars hastened the discovery of America.

The Crusades, moreover, advanced popular freedom by raising the power of the princes, and by effecting a closer union among the nations. One of their most

* "The Crusades," by Mr. Mabie, Vol. III., pp. 554-555.
† Vol. III., book xvi.

salutary results is the bringing about the decline of Feudalism. The Crusades gave the Church that commanding power she had hitherto lacked, and enabled her to enforce a practical equality in relation to justice between man and man. "An influence more powerful than Feudalism entered with them into European life, and was, perhaps, the most far-reaching and potential effect which they produced upon the world."*

No object, finally, was better calculated to correct the abuses which had become connected with the chivalrous sports of the age, and to set a proper aim to its warlike spirit than that afforded by the Crusades. Such in brief was the age in which St. Gerlach lived. Europe was in a state of great political and social changes, and chivalry was ascending to its zenith.

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* Mabie, Vol. III., p. 555.

CHAPTER II.

HOME AND EARLY EDUCATION OF ST. GERLACH. — HE BECOMES A SECULAR KNIGHT.

St. Gerlach was born of noble parents in Houthem*, Limburg, a small village near Valkenburg, in the South of Holland. This little hamlet lies in the charming valley of the Maas, which is formed by an offshoot of the Ardennes in France. A graceful series of hills, extending through Southern Holland from south-west to north-east, bound it on the north and south. Besides an exceedingly fertile and pleasant farming country the valley of the Maas boasts the Geul Creek, a stream of considerable size, which like a silvery thread runs through the province of Limburg, and then pours its clear waters into the Maas.

The extensive manor of the Gerlach family was traversed by the Geul, and lay about five miles north of the venerable old city of Maestricht.†

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* Houthem, originally (according to Rev. Father Habets) Holzheim, *sc.* "Heim," or "Wohnung am Walde," "Home by the Forest," is now a town of several hundred inhabitants, nestling at the foot of the hills Terblyt and Ravenswood.

† Maestricht, as its native name ("Trajectum ad Mosam") would seem to imply, dates from the time of the Romans, and Tacitus, who refers to this city under the name of "Pons Mosae," is said to have ordered the first bridge built across the Maas River at this point. There have been over seventy Catholic churches erected in this venerable city from the time of its origin up to the present, although its population never exceeded 33,000 souls. Maestricht has a highly interesting history, it having been for many

Politically, the village of Houthem, at Gerlach's time, belonged to the district of Maestricht, and was immediately subject to the Lords of Heinsberg-Valkenburg; this principality, however, together with the whole Liège Provence, belonged to the Holy Roman Empire of the German nation. At the time of Gerlach's birth King Henry I. (1002—24) occupied the throne in Germany.

In the year 1381 Valkenburg and vicinity, including Houthem, lost their independence and became, under Wenceslaus, subject to the Dukedom of Brabant. About the year 1540 Philip II., son of Emperor Charles V. of Spain, obtained possession of it, together with Burgundy. About a century later Maestricht, Hertogenbosch, Breda, Bergen-op-Zoom, and many other fortified towns and cities in the Low Countries were surrendered again by Spain; finally, according to the treaty made by the King of Spain and the Netherlands, and signed on the 16th of October, 1662, Valkenburg and vicinity was ceded to Holland, under whose dominion, with the exception of a few years, it has remained ever since.

At the time of St. Gerlach's birth Houthem did not possess a church or chapel, but belonged to the neighbouring parish of Meersen.* As early, however, as the

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centuries one of the strongholds of Western Europe and the scene of endless feuds and struggles. The Spanish and French left its inhabitants but little peace during the last few hundred years. Finally, in the year 1839, it was recognised as a provincial city of Holland. The caves of Maestricht, especially the ones under the Petersberg, are well worth mentioning. They are of very ancient date, stone having been taken from them ever since the time of the Romans. Even Pliny alludes to them in one of his works (*Cf.* "Historie Naturalis," Lib. XXXVI., 44).

* Marsna (Marsana) was originally a royal palace which, with a villa and adjoining lands, was presented by Queen Gerberga to the

close of the twelfth century it had a chapel and priest of its own. Later on the parish at Houthem came under the spiritual charge of the Norbertines. It belonged to the diocese of Liège till 1561, since which time it has been subject to the Bishop of Roermond, Limburg, with the exception of about forty years in the beginning of the present century.

Not much is known of the Saint's parents and early education. If it be allowed to amplify the scanty materials extant concerning the ancestors of Gerlach, it would seem that they had distinguished themselves in feats of warfare and chivalry. Gerlach, in the Limburg dialect "Geerling," signifies "Renown in war"; "ger" or "wer" (in French "guerre") is "strife" or "war," and the final syllable "lach" or "laucht" is in German "renowned." The elder Knight Gerlach was an honour to the name he bore. He was a nobleman of high rank and a cavalier whose name was mentioned with respect. Whether or not he took part in the first crusade is uncertain. But having been schooled in the trade of adventure and war,

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monks of St. Remigius in the year 968. About three centuries later the Benedictine monks ceded these possessions in Meersen to their successors, Regular Canons, in exchange for some property in France (*cf.* Boll., I., 309). The present handsome church at Meersen is an edifice of the fourteenth century. It was built under the direction of the Benedictine monks of Rheims after the style of the famous cathedral in their native city, and was the first Gothic church ever built in Holland. Meersen is known in history as the place where the famous treaty between Ludwig the German and Charles the Bold was drawn up, according to which the former received the German portion of Lorraine and the latter the Latinised. This little hamlet is also noted as having been a kind of royal summer resort. Louis Debonnaire, for instance, possessed a villa at Meersen, the ruins of which are still shown.

Knight Gerlach wished that his son be brought up in the same career. It is not known whether little Gerlach served as page, or later as esquire at some princely court. According to the custom of the times this would have been a necessary condition for his attaining the dignity of knighthood, had not his father been of high noble rank.

However, it seems that but little attention was devoted to young Gerlach's school education. Ignorance of letters, partially due to the small number of educational institutions, characterised the chivalry of this period. Even among the nobility illiteracy was not uncommon. The handwriting of many a young nobleman of that time, like that of De Bracy, if indeed it took any particular form, "often looked more like spear-heads and sword-blades than alphabetical characters." Hence we may conclude that the older Knight Gerlach was no exception to the rule. Not having experienced the need of a liberal education, he deemed such to be superfluous for his son.

The deeds of chivalry, on the other hand, were lauded and pointed out as the surest road to fame. It did not require much persuasion, however, to influence the young Gerlach to adopt the adventurous and romantic career of a knight. Being exceedingly well built, strong, agile, and of an indomitable will, he made it the object of his life to excel in the use of lance and sword, never to allow an insult to go unavenged, or to permit the least stain of weakness regarding this point to deface his escutcheon. To add new lustre to the glorious name he had inherited was to be his constant aim. To attain skill and glory

in the sports of chivalry soon became the younger Gerlach's ruling passion. Daily he might be seen preparing himself, in some manner or other, to meet an enemy with advantage at the next passage-at-arms. And yet what else were these exercises in him than the offering of sacrifice to the demon of vain-glory or some other inordinate passion.

Although Gerlach appears to have been by nature open in deed and true in word, his insatiable thirst for renown often made him indifferent to the justice, or injustice, of the means employed in attaining it. This inordinate longing for glory made him cold to the sentiment of others when they stood in his way, or when they hindered him in executing his ambitious designs. His conception of chivalry was far from that of a true and noble knight, such as the Church was striving to introduce. The applause of an admiring multitude at a blow well parried, or at the unhorsing of an antagonist, was his highest ideal. Gerlach was wont to scorn the unskilful or ill-fated knight, and to esteem the successful champion of the lists as worthy of the highest honours. Everything was subordinated to the attainment of worldly distinctions.

By his companions-at-arms Gerlach was considered a daring and jolly good fellow. But he was popular more on account of his skill in the sports of his time than his personal good qualities. His unusual natural talents for nobler and higher occupations remained undeveloped, and like the streams that fail to flow onward towards the sea, soon became stagnant and pestilential. A boundless greed for renown gradually predominated over him, and stifled every higher senti-

ment. The closest ties of friendship and love were often rent in order to satiate this ever increasing passion.

In the course of time also a greed for greater wealth manifested itself in his dealings with others. Gerlach was by nature of a fiery temperament. Thus we read that in a fit of passion, when still a boy, he kicked his own mother. And, after he had become heir to the immense fortune of his father, he was not free from cruelty and oppression towards those who were dependent upon him for a livelihood. Though noble in birth, he was far from being so in his treatment of his poor tenants, or with those in need. Gerlach was, in fine, an unscrupulous warrior, ever ready to enter upon a hazardous adventure if it offered any chance of increasing his fame or fortune; he was a selfish and daring cavalier, with little or nothing of Christian chivalry about him save the name.

CHAPTER III.

GERLACH GOES TO THE TOURNAMENT AT JUELICH.—TOTAL CHANGE OF MIND AND HEART.

About the year 1146, some years after Gerlach had been elevated to the dignity of knighthood, the Count of Juelich, one of the most powerful noblemen within a radius of many miles, announced that a passage-at arms was to take place in his native place. Heralds were sent out to extend personal invitations to all the knights in the western parts of the Empire, and, accordingly, also to Gerlach.

The tournaments of the Middle Ages formed one of the principal sports of that period and, at the same time, offered glory and fame to the successful combatant. We, in our times, can hardly form a just estimate of the grand scale on which these military and chivalrous exercises were sometimes carried on. Occasionally these contests were also appealed to by a condemned or accused party as a supposed means of proving his innocence. But by far the greater number of combatants who entered the lists did so from the mere desire of displaying their skill in handling the lance and sword.

To miss this occasion of exhibiting his dexterity and valour was to Gerlach a possibility out of the question. From his earliest years his father had taken great pains to instil into young Gerlach's mind a great love for feats of chivalry. Besides, being a man of great wealth and

knight of high standing, Gerlach possessed every advantage for acquiring distinction in these exercises which money and influence could procure. It is needless to add that he had profited by them, and that he now strained every nerve to play a successful *rôle* in the coming tourney to be held at Juelich.

On the day previous to this memorable display of arms, a perfect model—judging from a physical standpoint—of mediæval chivalry, riding at the head of a body of cavalry and escorted by a large number of esquires, he could be seen on the highway leading from Maestricht, viâ Valkenburg and Juelich, to Cologne. They were all on their way to the historic town of Juelich, or, as the Romans called it, "Juliacum." This ancient city lies about twenty miles east of Houthem, about midway between Aix-le-Chapelle and Cologne, on the river Roer. It was a city of importance in the Middle Ages and strongly fortified. Juelich is said to have derived its name from the fact that Julius Cæsar camped there for several days on his brilliant campaign against the tribes of Gaul about twelve centuries previous, in the year 55 B.C. As Gerlach, a victim of ambition and vain-glory, now rode leisurely over this same highway in quest of new honours he, no doubt, harboured much the same sentiments as "he who preferred being the first in an obscure village lying at the foot of the Alps to being the second man in Rome."

The features of Gerlach's countenance as he rode along possessed the soldier's undaunted firmness of expression, and his heart was, most probably, as hard as the steel corselet which encased it. Mounted on a

stately charger, whose trappings were of the costliest kind, he was cased cap-a-pie in full armour. A large silver casque, adorned with flowing crest, graced his head. His broadsword hung loosely from his belt, and the heavy lance in his sinewy right hand glimmered in the sunlight. His protected knee-boots were furnished with long and sharp rowels.

Upon his arrival in Juelich, Gerlach saw with delight that preparations were making for an unrivalled exhibition of chivalrous sports. As soon as he was recognised shouts of joy arose on all sides, and warm was the welcome he received; for, besides being an Imperial knight of noble lineage and an active officer in the standing army,* Gerlach possessed the reputation of a brave and skilful combatant. To-day's tourney was looked forward to by all with great pleasure, for it promised to be a memorable one in the annals of this stronghold. Gladiatorial exercises of single combat, or, as in this case, of a general joust, always drew large crowds of spectators; but this one had been announced a long time in advance, and was now attended by an exceptionally large number.

Long before daybreak large crowds had gathered around the lists, each striving to secure a good place. Many thousands of the commonalty already occupied the seats, arranged amphitheatre-like in the *campus* near the Count of Juelich's castle, as the advent of the nobility was hailed with joyous shouts by the excited multitude. The flower of the western portion of the Empire were now assembled and awaited with eager-

* "Tribunus Militum" (*Cf.* "Vita St. Gerlaci," *auctore* G. Cripio, quoted by the Bollandists, under January 5th).

ness for the contest to begin. As soon as the Count of Juelich, surrounded by numerous guests of high rank, had taken his seat on a neatly arranged daïs, a blast from the trumpets announced that the contestants might now advance and begin the combat.

Among the foremost of the knights to answer the summons of the heralds was the valiant and haughty Gerlach. He advanced with an appearance both commanding and self-confident, displaying a spirit of bravado at every movement. His approach was welcomed with cheers of delight by the nobility, with many of whom he was allied by birth. He appeared to be in high spirits at having this opportunity of adding new lustre to the glory obtained in former sports of the kind. Flushed with the great success he had hitherto enjoyed, Knight Gerlach confidently rides forward and hurls his gauntlet at the feet of the most valiant combatant. The challenge is accepted. They are just about to advance against each other in the lists, when the loud shouting of one of his faithful esquires reaches Gerlach's ear.

To the great astonishment of all, this messenger forces his way through the heralds and guards, and tells the knight the sad news which he had brought in all haste from Valkenburg. No sooner had Gerlach heard the words, "Thy lady has been thrown from her carriage and is fatally wounded; as I left she appeared to be dying," than his countenance assumed an ashy paleness. A loud cry of anguish escapes his lips: "My God! My God! Is it possible?"

On seeing the Knight Gerlach thus struggling with the deep grief which had overpowered him, a dead silence, of several moments' duration, came over the vast

ST. GERLACH TAKES ACTIVE PART IN THE JUELICH TOURNAMENT.

assembly. The commoners, not knowing the cause of the knight's sudden retreat, at once suspect foul play, and express impatience at the delay. Many of the noblemen present, upon learning the cause of Gerlach's inconsolable grief, hasten to assure him of their condolence. Others, again, observing his strange manner of acting, express doubts as to the man's sanity. "He has lost his mind! Remove him from the lists!" could now be heard here and there. And, indeed, for a person who is ignorant of the wonderful and sudden transformations which Divine grace at times produces in the human soul, Gerlach's actions on this occasion might have been with some degree of correctness thus interpreted.

On the one hand, inexpressible was his bereavement over the loss of his lady. He could not believe that his beloved consort, whom he had left on the preceding day in the bloom of youthful beauty, should now be a corpse; that he had been bereft of her to whose service he had been devoted for many years, and whom he loved more dearly than life itself. On the other hand, never had he experienced such a disgust for the vain pomp and glory of this brief life. As if in a paroxysm of conflicting passions struggling for the upper hand he threw aside his shield, helmet, and lance. A radical moral change seemed to be taking place in him. A ray of Divine grace had evidently entered into his soul and awakened his slumbering faith (which, like a coal buried beneath the ashes, had for years been inactive) to new life.

Gerlach's understanding, enlightened by the light of Heaven, now began to see things as they are, and to estimate them at their real and not at their apparent

value. As a flash of lightning over a yawning cañon reveals nothing save what is terrifying, thus the ray of heavenly light which now illumined the mind of Gerlach revealed the abyss of hell, into which he had so often merited to be hurled, yawning at his feet. In an instant the vanity of this world's glory, the emptiness of temporal pleasures, the folly of his past career, and the guilt of his sinful life, flashed upon him. Who knows what thoughts passed through the mind of Gerlach during those brief moments of interior anguish. His former misdeeds crowded in quick succession upon his mind and excited the bitterest remorse. As an ominous cloud, steadily increasing in size and power, sweeps over the heavens and darkens the light of the sun, so the sins of bygone years rushed upon his memory and enveloped his soul in the deepest gloom.

However, although the past excited sorrow and remorse, yet the future which dawned upon Gerlach was not one of dark despair. The heavenly grace which entered his soul was not rejected. The Faith which he had received in the holy Sacrament of Baptism once more became a living, active principle. Hence it had the effect on him which the lightning's glare that reveals the rocks and cliffs towards which his ship is heading has upon a careless pilot.

Dismounting from his handsome charger he lays aside everything which pride and vanity covets. He then mounts a mule, and with uncovered head sets out, in the deepest grief and distress of mind, to his desolate home. But how different from the proud and haughty knight who, in quest of human glory, had on the previous day passed in the contrary direction! A moral transfor-

mation, such as belongs to Divine grace, which changes lions into lambs, is taking place within the soul of this humbled and contrite knight.

When, upon his arrival home, he learned that his lady had passed away shortly after the accident, his sorrow was pitiable to behold. His enlightened intellect, however, accepted the severe blow as having been dealt by Heaven. His strong will, assisted by the grace of God, finally subdued the deep grief of his soul. After the storms with which his mind had been agitated subsided, he became strengthened in his resolution to amend, and henceforth to live for God alone.

A POEM.

GERLACH'S REFLECTIONS AT THE SIDE OF HIS DEPARTED CONSORT.

Has all thy graceful beauty come to this?
Can this be thou whose very look brought bliss?
Thou wast, then, but a shadow fleeting by,
That ruled the hearts of men and charmed the eye!

But where thy rosy cheek and sparkling eye,
Thy pleasant smile? Ah! This it is to die!
A radiant flower, nipped by cruel frost,
Thou art bereft of all that can be lost.

Why longer cast I with this world my lot,
And long for what to-day exists, to-morrow's not?
Oh, human glory! What hast thou to give!
No longer shall I strive for thee to live!

Why play a part in this vain outward scene—
Prefer a mortal to immortal queen?
A court far grander is the court above,
Where all for ever merge in perfect love!

Dear Virgin mild! Spurn not a contrite heart,
But lead me far from sin and world apart!
My God! Do Thou accept me as Thine own,
For Thee I wish to live, for Thee alone!

PART II.

GERLACH, A PENITENT IN THE HOLY LAND.

CHAPTER I.

GERLACH GOES TO ROME AND THROWS HIMSELF AT THE FEET OF POPE EUGENE III.

No sooner had the grace of God revealed to Gerlach the deplorable state of his soul than he determined to amend. Recognising his deep guilt, he was resolved to wipe it out. When temptations arose against his resolutions and God's mercy he would constantly repeat to himself the words of holy Scripture: "God's mercy is infinite," "nor will He despise a contrite and humble heart." Thus the Divine grace which had so often invited him to a better life had finally become efficacious and won the day. He now determined to enter upon a new life of penance and charity. But how and where? This, thought he, should be decided by another. He wished that the new plan of life upon which he was about to enter should be determined by Christ's Vicar on earth.

Accordingly, after Gerlach had laid his beloved wife to rest, and left the management of his estate to a trustworthy steward, he laid aside his costly garments. A close-fitting hair-shirt, and over this a coat of mail, made of iron rings, were put on in their stead. He then donned a pilgrim's cloak which, in order to hide his instruments of penance, he girded closely with a leathern belt. A worn-out mantle, shabby head-covering, and pilgrim's staff completed the outfit of the holy penitent.

Bidding those of his relations and friends whom he chanced to meet a long farewell he set out on foot for the Holy City.

On the way thither he visited the shrines of the saints venerated in cities through which he passed. Great, indeed, must have been the hardships connected with such a journey over rough roads, hills, and mountains. Even on horseback this pilgrimage would have been fraught with the greatest fatigue and hardship. Unmindful, however, of sufferings, Gerlach sought to make the journey to Rome as difficult as possible. He wore no shoes, and limited his food to that which was absolutely necessary. Who can estimate the privations connected with a journey of this kind, especially for a man like Gerlach? For it must be borne in mind that he had been brought up in accordance with his noble rank—amid all the comforts wealth could afford. True, he had often in life undergone great hardships, but not from a love of God: his love of adventure had made them easy. Never had he experienced the pangs of hunger or pinching cold, against which poverty is unable to protect itself. Long and difficult was this pilgrimage, especially the portion of it which led over the Alps.

What a joy it must have been, then, for Gerlach as he at length beheld, after many months of wearisome travelling, the lofty spires of Rome looming up in the distance! What spiritual delight and encouragement to know that from this sacred spot thousands of martyrs and confessors had taken their flight to Heaven! Rome's soil had drunk the blood of the early Christians and given life to that mystical tree whose branches envelop the earth! The heart of Christen-

dom had finally been reached. Here, from the Vicar of Christ, he hoped to obtain the coveted permission of entering upon a life of severe penance and Christian charity.

Upon his arrival Gerlach at once betook himself to the Lateran, and petitioned for an audience with His Holiness Pope Eugene III.* His rank and mission gained him admittance to the Pope without much delay. The latter, recognising the deep religious spirit of the pilgrim, received him with the greatest kindness. The Holy Father even condescended to hear his confession, and, having heard it, he gave Gerlach absolution from his sins and a penance. But no penance seemed sufficiently great to the humble Gerlach! Finally, in accordance with the contrite and willing spirit of the pilgrim, the Pope imposed a very severe penance upon him: Gerlach was to go to the Holy Land, and there spend seven years in the service of the poor and sick in some hospital.

With the greatest delight did he enter upon the fulfilment of this Heaven imposed satisfaction for his sins. To be able to serve Christ, our Lord, in the poor and sick—especially in that land where He had died on the Cross for the sins of mankind—was to his mind an inestimable grace. Having, therefore, learned the will of God for the next seven years, from His Vicar on earth, Gerlach lost no time in carrying it into execution. As soon as practicable he set out with joyous heart for the Holy Land. What a pleasing sight the soul of this

* This holy Pope, who reigned from 1145 to 1153, had been a pupil of St. Bernard of Clairvaux. He occupied the Papal throne during a very stormy period, and was compelled to flee from Rome several times. He is venerated as a Blessed.

penitent must have become to the eyes of God. What an object of delight to the kingdom of Heaven! Only a short time ago his soul was still dark and hideous, reflecting none of the supernatural light which God shed upon it. But, as a piece of worthless carbon is changed by the physical and chemical powers of nature into a precious diamond, so Gerlach's soul, by the wonderful power of Divine grace and his own free will, had been changed into a jewel, destined one day to adorn the crown of our Holy Mother Church. But his soul was still a diamond in the rough, and had to be subjected to the file of penance and self-denial.

CHAPTER II.

GERLACH SPENDS SEVEN YEARS DEVOTED TO PENANCE AND CHARITY IN THE HOLY LAND.

SHORTLY after his audience with Pope Eugene III. Gerlach left Rome for Jerusalem, where he arrived about a month later. At this time, about the year 1147, the greater portion of Palestine was under Christian sway. At three o'clock p.m., on the 15th of July, in the year 1099, Godfrey of Bouillon had taken possession of Jerusalem, and deposed its Turkish governor. His brother, Baldwin I., in the following year established the kingdom of Jerusalem, which comprised the whole of Palestine. Moreover, Antioch and Tripolis were also governed by Christian rulers. Christianity, therefore, was at this time shedding its benign rays of civilisation upon nearly all the heathen nations of Western Asia. Edessa, it is true, had only a few years before been reconquered by the Turks, and thirty thousand Christians slain ; still, the power obtained by the Christians during the first crusade in Jerusalem and vicinity was still in their possession.

It was, consequently, a source of exceeding pleasure to Gerlach to find, upon his arrival in Jerusalem, the scenes of Christ's earthly pilgrimage in the hands of those possessing the same Faith as himself. Upon his arrival he first visited all the holy places made memorable by the passion and death of our Saviour. What

must have been this holy pilgrim's sentiments upon entering the Garden of Olives, the Hall of the Last Supper, or, when making the Holy Way of the Cross on the very road which drank up his Saviour's most Precious Blood! If our heart thrills with emotion while treading the ground where some great battle has been fought, how much more must the sight and touch of the land made sacred by the passion and death of the Son of God appeal to the imagination and heart of the pious believer! The holy places were like an eloquent sermon, and seemed to exhort him to penance and prayer. They vividly recalled the consoling truths of the Incarnation, and appealed to his deepest gratitude and love. They inspired him with the hope that his sins had been forgiven, and encouraged him to enter upon a life of virtue. How grateful this holy penitent was to pray, labour, and suffer, where his Divine Redeemer had deigned to do so much for him!

Having, with great reverence and consolation, visited the holy places in and about Jerusalem, Gerlach next directed his steps to a Catholic hospital for the sick. There were at this time many institutions of the kind in the Holy City. Pilgrims to the Holy Land were no longer abused by the insolent Turk as in former years. Owing to the salutary influence of the Crusaders, Catholic institutions and hospitals for the harbouring of sick pilgrims might be seen in all parts of the city. Among others was the large institution in charge of the Brothers of the Hospital.* Their hospital had been founded in

* From the year 1143 the German Brothers of the Hospital were temporarily united with the Knights of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem and subject to them.

the year 1128 by Gerlach's countrymen for the benefit of poor and sick pilgrims. Hence, what was more natural than that he should apply for employment among these noble and self-sacrificing "servants of their masters, the sick"? However, upon his presenting himself the good Brothers soon discovered that Gerlach's shabby clothes ill-suited him. The noble bearing and polite manner of Gerlach showed him to be a man of rank and ability. Gladly would the Brothers accept the applicant's services, but what suitable employment could they offer a man of his capacity and rank? They accordingly proposed one of the most trustworthy and responsible offices that could be entrusted to a man of Gerlach's capabilities. But, to their astonishment, they learned from Gerlach's own lips that he would accept none but the most menial position in the hospital, that he sought not honours and distinctions, but wished, as our Blessed Lord had done in Nazareth, to spend as hidden a life as possible in the service of God and his neighbour. Nothing would satisfy his humility and his noble aspirations save the humble occupation of tending the cattle and swine belonging to the hospital. The good Brothers finally accepted Gerlach's services in this menial capacity. What sublime humility and self-abasement! Gerlach, a man of distinguished rank and great wealth—a man whose name was mentioned with the greatest respect—becomes of his own free will a swineherd!

The allurements and glitter of worldly honour, pleasures, and goods, no longer led him astray, for he had once for all abandoned the world and its pomp. It was during Gerlach's stay in Jerusalem that a German

army of Crusaders, under the leadership of their King, Conrad III., after sustaining heavy loses by treachery in the defiles of Iconium, arrived in the Holy Land. What a surprise it must have been to these, his former companions-in-arms, to see the valiant and successful Knight Gerlach clad in shabby garments and following the avocation of an ordinary farm-hand. Gladly would they have received him into their ranks, conferred upon him the highest military distinctions, and fought under his command. But Gerlach cared not for human honours and distinctions. His conversion had been sincere and thorough. To be despised for Christ's sake and forgotten was the one distinction he sought. From a spirit of penance he would, henceforth, shun whatever the worldly minded love and desire, and seek what they despise and abhor. Enlightened by Divine grace he clearly saw that everything in this world is to be valued only in proportion to its usefulness in serving us to attain Heaven—the glorious end for which we have been created.

His menial services around the hospital, however, did not satisfy Gerlach's spirit of penance and mortification. His deep contrition and love of God prompted him to do far more than the penance imposed by His Holiness Eugene III. Though Gerlach was all kindness to others, in his own regard he daily practised the greatest austerity. The nourishment he allowed himself was scanty and of the poorest kind. He chastised his body as if it were a stubborn beast of burden. Indeed, his life seemed to be a holocaust offered on the altar of prayer and mortification. By means of his severe penances he obtained God's favour, and drew down upon himself and others

abundant grace. Whilst watching the cattle or sheep on the neighbouring hillsides he was wont to pray from morn till night. Evenings and several hours of the night were employed in the service of the sick. Thus he divided his time between prayer, work, and suffering.

One day, as Gerlach was thus acting as shepherd, he accidentally stepped on a sharp thorn. The wound was exceedingly painful and slow in healing; but the holy penitent did not allow the acute pain it caused to keep him from his usual occupation. On alluding to the wound he would refer to it as a special favour of Divine Providence. "For," said he, "it was with this same foot that I, when a boy, in my base ingratitude and hot-headedness, kicked my beloved mother. What kindness of Almighty God to have, like a good parent, thus punished me for my sins against the fourth commandment. Should I not gladly bear this little pain in atonement for that ungrateful act, and for having so often abandoned the path of duty, whilst Jesus, my Saviour and Lord, suffered His feet to be cruelly pierced out of love for me!" Thus, in holy contemplation, penance, and charitable deeds passed the blessed years of atonement which Gerlach spent in the Holy Land. A glance towards Calvary, and the thought of the heart-rending scene which was enacted there eleven centuries previous, made every trial easy and lightened every burden.

CHAPTER III.

GERLACH RECEIVES AN APOSTOLIC BRIEF FROM POPE HADRIAN IV. AND RETURNS TO HIS NATIVE LAND.

When the seven years' penance, imposed by His Holiness Pope Eugene III., had been accomplished, Gerlach, after due deliberation and prayer, decided to return to his native land. Gladly would he have remained in Palestine, and there, amid the sacred scenes of our Lord's earthly pilgrimage, spend the rest of his days in prayer and holy contemplation. Such a life would have been more in accordance with his natural inclinations, for he lived and laboured for his Creator alone; and surely no country on earth is more calculated to elevate one's thoughts and desires heavenward than the one which witnessed the divine mystery of the Incarnation. However, the conviction that he could promote God's glory most in that place where he had offended against it by a life of sin, grew stronger in Gerlach's mind from day to day.

The scene of a sinful career should become, with God's grace, the scene of a life of penance and prayer. Those who had been scandalised by his proud, arrogant, and irreligious spirit, should be edified by a humble, unassuming, and conscientious life. His vassals and servants, whom he had often treated with harshness and contempt, should henceforth experience at his hand the benign influence of Christian charity. Due reparation,

even to the last farthing, should be made where wrong had been committed. Gerlach wished, moreover, if it were God's holy will, to distinguish himself as a knight of Christ in the country of his birth, where as an Imperial knight he had been guilty of so many excesses.

Imbued with this noble spirit, Gerlach took leave of the holy places in and about Jerusalem, and went to Rome in order to propose his plan to the Pope: for he well knew that man is the poorest judge in matters concerning his own spiritual welfare, and that a humble and submissive spirit in regard to God's holy will must form the basis of every action. Fully convinced that Christian obedience is the queen among the virtues, Gerlach wished to learn the will of God from His Vicar on earth and then to carry it into effect.

Upon his arrival in Rome he at once proceeded to the Lateran, and, throwing himself at the feet of Hadrian IV.,* who during his stay in Palestine had succeeded Eugene III., begged His Holiness to determine a mode of life for him which he might follow to God's greater glory. The Pope thereupon proposed that he enter one of the Congregations or Religious Orders, which at that time were doing so much good in the Church. But the rules of the various Orders and Congregations, thought Gerlach, were not in accordance with the path of perfection which Almighty God wished him to follow; for, replied the holy pilgrim, "I have solemnly vowed never to mount a horse, always throughout life to wear a hair-

* Hadrian IV., 1154—1159 (Nicolas Breakspeare), was the only Englishman that ever occupied the Papal throne. The peace of his Pontificate was much disturbed by Frederic Barbarossa's repeated violations of the Calixtine Concordat. Frederic was crowned at Rome by Hadrian IV., in the year 1155, and died in 1190.

shirt, to abstain from meat and intoxicating drinks, and daily to observe a strict fast. However, my will is entirely subject to that of your Holiness, in whom I acknowledge Almighty God's representative, and I am ready to adopt that manner of life which is made known to me."

Upon hearing these edifying and self-sacrificing words of the saintly Gerlach, the Holy Father, enlightened by Heaven, bade him return to his native land, and there to devote the income of his manorial possessions to charitable purposes. "As to his vows, such acts of self-denial and holy austerity, performed in a humble and obedient spirit, could not but be pleasing to Almighty God and secure Heaven's choicest gifts for himself and for others."

The Pope thereupon had his counsel as to the plan of life Gerlach was to adopt drawn up in the form of an Apostolic Brief* and handed it, with his blessing, to the holy penitent. Great, indeed, was Gerlach's gratitude for this apostolic favour. His desire to lead a retired life of penance and charitable deeds where he had so often offended his Creator had been ratified by Almighty God's representative on earth. Full of spiritual consolation he took leave of the tomb of the Apostles and returned to Houthem, the village of his birth. Having had his path marked out to him by one of God's representatives in spiritual matters, he could be certain that every step he advanced on it would bring him nearer the object of his love— nearer his heavenly goal, for "The path of the just, as a shining light, goeth forwards and increaseth even to perfect day."†

* An Apostolic Brief is a letter from the Pope, less solemn than a Bull, and differing from it in form. The one received by Gerlach was preserved for many centuries in the Norbertine Convent at Houthem (Habets, p. 74). † Prov. iv. 18.

PART III.

GERLACH, A KNIGHT OF CHRIST.

CHAPTER I.

GERLACH PRACTISES GREAT AUSTERITIES.

After his return to Houthem, the village of his birth, Gerlach arranged his domestic affairs so as to be able to lead a secluded life in the constant and faithful observance of his vows. Formerly he had led a comfortable and indulgent life, always bent on escaping the trials and burdens of our earthly pilgrimage. As an unscrupulous knight, he ever strove to gain greater renown in the lists and to extend his possessions. No pains or expense were spared if they offered any prospect of increasing the fame he already enjoyed. He seemed to live for this world and its vain, transitory glory. Attached to things present, he had become quite indifferent to things to come.

But, now, far other thoughts and aims occupy his mind. He hearkens to every invitation of Divine grace, and follows its least promptings with the greatest fidelity. That which he had formerly loved and sought to obtain becomes now the object of his contempt. What, as an Imperial knight, he had formerly despised and spurned, he now cherishes and esteems. The words of our Divine Lord, "If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and let him take up his cross daily and follow Me," were continually before his mind. This exhortation, first uttered by Him who had come from Heaven to be the way, the truth, and the life of every

Christian, became the mainspring of all his actions. Thoroughly convinced that "the spirit of mortification and self-denial is the fundamental law of Christianity, the first principle of the Gospel, and the most essential means of attaining eternal salvation," Gerlach wished to follow its path. He desired to die to self in order to live solely for and in God.

His great love of Christ, moreover, who had never departed from the path leading to Calvary's height, urged him to follow as closely as possible in his Redeemer's footprints. As a fervent knight of Christ, he is resolved to conform his entire life to the illustrious example of his Divine Master! Not content with accepting the trials which this life necessarily brings with it, as coming from the loving hand of our Heavenly Father, this zealous servant of Christ wished to go further. He not only desired to follow his thorn-crowned King, but he also wished to imitate Him. Since Christ, therefore, preferred poverty to riches, so would he henceforth restrict himself to that which is absolutely necessary and detach his heart from things temporal. As Christ had preferred a life of hardships to one of comfort and indulgence, so would he exchange the comforts his castle afforded for the disagreeableness of a poor domicile. On his estate there stood a large oak-tree, whose spacious trunk was somewhat decayed. This old oak was chosen in preference to his castle. Having left the future management of his financial matters and the manorial superintendence of his large estate in the hands of others, Gerlach hollowed out the trunk of this immense tree and forthwith took up his abode in it. The floor of his new home was paved with

stone and covered with a matting. A crucifix, hung up against the wall, completed the furniture of this his future abode.

Great, indeed, was the astonishment of Gerlach's former friends and some of his relatives upon learning that he had taken up his abode in the pitiable cell of a hollow oak-tree in preference to his beautiful castle. Many of his former acquaintances even considered this strange manner of acting as a conclusive proof of Gerlach's insanity. To Gerlach, however, who preferred dishonour to honour, so long as it be lawfully incurred, this contempt into which he had fallen was accepted as a Divine favour. For he well knew that the carnal man cannot understand the ways of God and the promptings of the Holy Spirit: "Wisdom will not enter into a malicious soul, nor dwell in a body subject to sin" (Book of Wisdom i. 4). And, had not his Divine Master also been taken for a fool by some of His own relatives and friends? The empty opinion of men would neither deter *him*. The richly furnished chambers in his castle were consequently abandoned for the damp and narrow cell of a hollow oak-tree. Out of love for his beloved Lord and Master he was resolved to spend a life of self-denial and prayer in this truly humble abode.

His nourishment, moreover, was to be unpalatable and scanty. Gerlach made arrangements with a relative, who lived hard by, daily to send him a small loaf of barley bread, baked of dough which had been seasoned with ashes. To this daily pittance, and the water of a neighbouring well, the Saint limited himself. His vow never to drink intoxicants was renewed and strictly observed

to the end of his life. Gerlach, moreover, wore a hair-shirt close to his body continually, and over it a coat of mail, made of metal rings. These are a few of the many austerities to which this holy man subjected his body.

CHAPTER II.

PROMINENT FEATURES OF GERLACH'S INTERIOR LIFE.

ONE of the greatest dangers to a man's spiritual welfare is the possession of temporal goods. It is difficult to detach the heart from earthly possessions and to centre its affections on the Creator. And yet we are bidden to love God with our *whole* heart! Gerlach well knew from sad experience that the more the soul is agitated by the desire of wealth the more insensible it becomes to the operations of Divine grace. Hence he had striven for years to root out of his heart every attachment to that which the world seeks and prizes.

Though he passed for a man of great wealth, still there was none poorer in spirit than he. Had Almighty God suddenly deprived His servant of his manorial estate, he would, without a moment's hesitation, have cheerfully exclaimed with holy Job: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord."* For with the aid of Divine grace he had freed himself perfectly from the strong desire he had formerly experienced for temporal goods. By constant practice of the greatest self-denial and mortification, he had finally attained to that blessed state of holy indifference in regard to things temporal which makes man really great, yea, like unto the angels. Like St. Louis of France, St. Gregory, St. Paula of Rome, and so

* Job i. 21.

many others who were rich in the eyes of the world, had done before him, Gerlach held his possessions as if he held them not. He was no longer a slave of inordinate passions, but a free and independent man. He possessed his passions, they no longer possessed him. His aim for years had been to subject every fibre of his being to God's holy will, and to make Him the absolute master and proprietor of all his affections.

Thus he had acquired an intimate union with God. His soul gradually rose on the fiery wings of Divine love, and now moved in a higher, supernatural sphere. He loved to be alone with his God, in order to be the better able to nourish his mind with the Divine Presence and enjoy its sweetness. Directing all his thoughts and actions to God alone, Gerlach valued everything in proportion as it brought him nearer the object of his intense love. On all occasions he strove to learn and to do that which was the more pleasing to Almighty God, in whom he seemed to be wholly absorbed.

Shortly after his return Gerlach, with the special permission of the Norbertine Order, assumed their habit, and thus professed before the world that he had taken his lot with God. Daily this faithful servant advanced on the path of virtue, and God's grace filled his heart and mind. He seemed to run on the way of the counsels—forgetting with each day the prayers and mortifications he had already sent heavenwards, and striving to do what was still undone. As a lake that lies off by itself amid the peaks of the Rockies reflects the heavens in its silvery waters more clearly, thus did Gerlach's soul, interiorly detached and

separated from the world, reflect every ray of heavenly light which fell upon it. He was in the world, but not of it. His life was in accordance with every wish of Almighty God—a hymn of praise in harmony with that of the angels in Heaven, for it was a life of fervent communion with God.

Whatever time he could procure for oral prayer was devoted to petitioning Heaven's blessings for himself and his fellow-men. Every morning, with the exception of Saturdays and Sundays, he was wont to rise long before daybreak and go to the neighbouring town of Maestricht, there to join the choir of religious at the Church of St. Servatius in their Matins. The time between Matins and the offering of the Divine mysteries he would spend in vocal prayer at the grave of St. Servatius.* Though Maestricht lies five miles

* The Feast of St. Servatius is on the 13th of May. The grave of this holy Bishop, who died in 384, is still shown, and is said to be the oldest Catholic spot in Holland. From the year 384 to 722 Maestricht was an Episcopal See. It was established here by St. Servatius, who had been driven from his former See, Tongern (*Dioecesis Tungrensis*) by the Huns. Every one of the Bishops of Maestricht, twenty-one in number, are venerated as saints. Among them are the illustrious Hubertus, Monulphus, and Amandus. St. Monulphus, who died in 588, gave the diocese his immense fortune, owing to which it was some years later ranked amongst the principalities. After the martyrdom of Maestricht's last bishop, St. Lambert, his successor, St. Hubert, removed the Episcopal See to Liège (*Leodium*) in 722. The changes brought about by the French Revolution annexed the diocese of Liège to the Church of Belgium.

At present a handsome Gothic church is built over the grave of Maestricht's first bishop. It is noted especially for its large collection of shrines and relics. The holy remains of St. Servatius are preserved in an exquisite gold-plated shrine, about six feet long, that stands behind the main altar open to view. Once in seven years the entire collection of relics is exposed for the veneration of

distant from Houthem, and the road which connects the two places is very hilly, Gerlach continued to a high old age in the pious practice of making this daily pilgrimage in his bare feet.

Every Saturday*, in honour of the Blessed Virgin, he made a pilgrimage to the church dedicated to her in Aachen†. This city is at least fifteen miles distant from Houthem. However, no violence of cold in winter nor intensity of heat in summer, neither frozen nor slippery roads, could prevent the holy anchorite from performing this proof of his devotion to our Heavenly Mother. If the difficulties connected with these daily pilgrimages may be taken as a standard for measuring his piety, surely it can hardly be over-estimated!

Moreover, though it may seem a paradox, Gerlach's life was one of great interior peace and happiness. If on a cold winter's day we had met this holy man of God

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the faithful, who are wont to come in large numbers from far and wide. It is a most beautiful ceremony! From ten to fifteen of the clergy, clad in surplice, carry the reliquaries from the sacristy to the centre of the church. Here the pastor gives a short sketch of the lives of the saints whose relics are shown, and closes with a brief exhortation. More than a hundred reliquaries and shrines are thus shown. The ceremony takes place daily for two weeks, and lasts over three hours. The silver and gold-plated busts containing the relics of the saintly bishops that once governed the diocese are most beautiful and costly works of art. During the entire exposition the greatest silence prevails amongst the vast crowd of pilgrims. The genuine piety depicted on every countenance is an evident proof of the salutary influence still exerted by the holy bishops of Maestricht.

* Not on Sundays, as Lauber states.

† This church, "the Dome," was originally called the Church of our Lady. It was built by Charlemagne, and most probably dedicated by Pope Leo III. in the year 804.

on one of his pilgrimages to Maestricht or Aachen, we would most probably have considered him a most unhappy mortal. The sight of a man making a journey in his bare feet, and that over rough and frozen roads, would surely have roused our deepest compassion. And yet, far from being miserable, Gerlach was one of the happiest men on earth. His life was one of the greatest peace and interior joy. That pure and heavenly peace which shone from his wan, yet pleasant countenance, was a foretaste of eternal happiness! His was that inexpressible supernatural joy which a Blessed Leonard Chimura, S.J., possessed, who, when being burned at the stake for his faith, "covered his head with the burning embers as with flowers, and sang aloud the *Laudate Dominum*." It was that ineffable peace of soul which arises from the consciousness of being a child of God, an heir to Heaven, and a faithful servant of the Most High. Gerlach was in the service of God, which is essentially one of joy and happiness; so much so, that we cannot even imagine a downcast and gloomy being amongst those who pre-eminently belong to God's service. We are unable to represent to our mind those blessed ministers of peace in Heaven otherwise than as the most blissful beings in creation. And this, because they are servants of Almighty God and intimately united with Him, the source of all true joy and happiness. Their every wish is fulfilled and they are perfectly happy; for they possess the fulness of peace and bliss, without the least fear of losing it.

The measure, moreover, of a creature's happiness is in proportion to his love of the Creator. Thus the angels are happier than we, because they love Almighty God

more. They participate in the Divine gifts in proportion to the degree of their love. This law is as unalterable as God Himself. For the effect of love is the communication of that which can be lawfully given. We see this truth realised to its fullest extent in God, who is infinitely perfect.

The Three Persons of the Blessed Trinity are united by the closest bonds of love imaginable. The Father loves the Son and the Holy Ghost with a boundless love, which is reciprocated by them in an infinitely perfect degree. Hence, all creation, without exception, belongs equally to each of the Three Divine Persons. A "mine" and "thine" would disturb the sublime harmony which essentially belongs to the All-perfect and Triune God. What belongs to the one of the Three Divine Persons, belongs also to the other two, because the communication of that which can be lawfully given is the immediate result of perfect love; and, the greater the love, the greater will also be the equality of possessions among those who love one another. Consequently, he who loves God is loved by Him in return, and participates in the Divine peace and happiness in proportion to his love.

We are justified, then, in concluding that Gerlach enjoyed great interior peace and happiness, for he loved God with his whole heart. Amid all his austerities and afflictions he possessed a peace which the worldly-minded are neither able to give nor to understand. The kingdom of God was within him, and with it that supernatural consolation which can be enjoyed, but not expressed.

This is the unspeakable temporal reward attached to

the service of God—to a life of self-denial and mortification such as becomes a follower of Christ. Almighty God will never allow Himself to be outdone in generosity! He invariably takes up His abode in the heart that frees itself from inordinate self-love and attachments to creatures. Heaven and earth, and all things therein, contribute to the happiness of him who freely "becomes poor in spirit" out of love of God. He becomes "a joint heir of Christ," whom the Father hath appointed "heir of all things"! Yea, Almighty God Himself deigns to become the possession of such a soul.

CHAPTER III.

HIS BOUNDLESS CHARITY TOWARDS THE POOR.

Among the many virtues which adorned the character of St. Gerlach, one of the most conspicuous was his love towards the poor. He was a true and sympathising friend of every one in bodily need. Upon seeing him with bounteous hand distributing the products of his large estate to the poor, one would have considered him a worthy object of the virtue he was then exercising. His features eloquently expressed the ascetic privations which he practised and the scanty pittance to which he restrained himself. His table no longer groaned under the weight of the choicest fare and the best wines, and his couch was the hard damp floor of the hollow oak. Even a dog, if unable to obtain food elsewhere, would have disdained Gerlach's table, and most likely also his couch.

What Gerlach denied himself, however, he gave with bounteous hand to others. His vassals and servants, who, in years happily passed, were wont to avoid his presence or tremble before him, now found in him a sincere and warm-hearted friend. In all their afflictions and cares they first sought his aid or advice. Nor was Gerlach's solicitous care limited to those only who belonged to his household.

Recognising our Blessed Lord in every mendicant, the holy man could be seen at meal-times doling out food to

ST. GERLACH CONSOLING THE POOR AND AFFLICTED.

every one who appealed to his charity with a love and readiness as great as that of a mother towards her children. He seemed to be continually transgressing the bounds of neglect of self and liberality towards others, and this out of love of Him "who, being rich, became poor for our sake, that through His poverty we might be rich."* The kindness with which he gave was often appreciated more than the gift itself. Daily the poor peasants of the vicinity, or needy travellers, assembled by the score to seek temporal aid from the holy anchorite, and they were sure to obtain it. Though austere to himself, he was all sweetness to others.

What a beautiful example of Christian charity this worthy knight of Christ gives us! It appears to be the tendency of the age to spread a love for all humanity, and to introduce as much equality among men as the social condition of mankind will permit. If this be true, such men as the noble and generous anchorite of Houthem do most to bring about this happy condition of affairs. Such men have the highest claim to the praiseworthy title of "benefactors of mankind."

What is truly noble and self-sacrificing is, also, necessarily against our corrupt nature. Inordinate self-love, that great obstacle to works of charity, must be overcome. The Saints, however, were the most successful in this noble strife. They were the greatest benefactors, and distinguished themselves most in charitable deeds, because they possessed the least self-love. But they were neither charitable nor saintly by nature: they became such by mortifying themselves and overcoming the inordinate self-love which is so strong in man.

* 2 Cor. viii. 9.

"There are two kinds of fraternal love, which are as different as the ruddy hue which health pours over the countenance and the artificial bloom with which Vanity colours her cheek; the one adds an untold charm to the character and bears the test of self-sacrifice, the other does not." True fraternal love springs forth from the love of God, and bears the test in the hour of need. Hence he who possesses the greater love of God possesses also the greater love towards his neighbour. The saints loved their neighbour as themselves, because they loved God above all. Yea, they readily denied themselves what might be of service to another in need. Like St. Peter Claver, they considered it a privilege to be "a slave of the slaves."

CHAPTER IV.

GERLACH'S APOSTOLIC ZEAL.

THE love of Gerlach towards his neighbour was not satisfied with relieving others in their temporal needs only. It prompted him, moreover, to do still more for his neighbour's *spiritual* welfare. Works of penance and prayers were continually offered up in propitiation and satisfaction for the sins by which God is offended. Besides, whenever an opportunity offered itself of consoling an afflicting soul, or of warning a sinner of the danger in which he was of losing eternal salvation, Gerlach never failed to take advantage of it.

Frequently people would wait along the roadside for him on his return from his daily pilgrimage to Maestricht, and beg him to speak to them on religious topics. Also, after the afflicted peasants of the neighbourhood had partaken of the repast prepared by Gerlach, they would ask him to address them on our Blessed Lord, or on one of the Christian virtues. On these occasions his attentive audience would thirstily drink in the words of encouragement and Christian hope which flowed sweeter than honey from Gerlach's lips. After he had said a few words, as was his custom, on the ingratitude of sin and the necessity of penance, he would congratulate these paupers and invalids on their lot:

"Behold," he would say, "our Divine Lord, who left His heavenly throne out of love for us! His life was

an uninterrupted series of privations and sufferings. And such was His intense love towards the poor that he wished to become one of them. Surely the poorest among you, beloved, has found a better home in his infancy than the forsaken and damp stable of Bethlehem. Not kings and princes, but needy and simple peasants were the first to be called by the Infant Jesus on that glorious Christmas night. In Nazareth He grew up in poverty and want, earning His daily bread in the sweat of His brow. For thirty long years the Son of God lived in the greatest obscurity, and followed the trade of an ordinary carpenter.

"And with what warmth does He not address you in the Sermon on the Mount: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit,' He says; 'blessed are you that mourn, for you shall be comforted!'* In a few years we shall all be summoned before the judgment-seat of God, 'who will render to each man according to his works.'† Not according to the false principles of this world shall we then be judged. Before that heavenly tribunal, from whose sentence there is no appeal, the pauper and day-labourer will stand on a level with the rich and those of noble birth. The rich man's wealth will then be of no avail to him, for, 'man has brought nothing into this world, and shall certainly carry nothing out.'‡ The good works we have performed and the virtues we have practised shall alone be taken into account. If you then, beloved, bear the cross with resignation, which a loving hand has placed upon your shoulders, an eternity of bliss awaits you. There 'Almighty God will wipe

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* Matt. v. 3, *seqq.* † Rom. ii. 6. ‡ 1 Tim. vi. 7.

away all tears,' and 'you will rejoice in glory.'* And the heavier your cross is on earth, the greater will be your future happiness. For the nearer we approach our Lord on Calvary in this life, the greater will be our reward in Heaven!"

With these and similar truths of our holy religion Gerlach was wont to console the poor and afflicted that appealed to his charity. Encouraged anew by the words of the holy ascetic they would return home with joyous hearts, and bless our Saviour for having deemed them worthy to lead a life similar to the one chosen by Him.

As a true knight of Christ, Gerlach, moreover, waged a vigorous and continual warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil. To root out the vices which Satan had planted in men's hearts, and to propagate the Christian virtues in their stead, was his constant aim. When he heard, for instance, of a man in the neighbourhood being given to a worthless and sinful life he appeared to become transported with holy anger. After having devoted many hours to fervent prayer for the misguided creature, he would manage to meet him and beg him to have mercy on his poor soul. Then, with the greatest earnestness tempered by love, he would warn the sinner of the great danger he was in of being eternally damned. His words, glowing with the fire of Divine love, would often inflame the coldest hearts and soften the hardest, for his hearers realised that "the wounds of such a friend are better than the deceitful kisses of an enemy."† Coming from a heart set on fire with the purest and most disinterested love towards his neighbour, his

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* Ps. cxlix. 5. † Prov. xxvii. 6.

words were sure to awaken a deep contrition in the minds of his hearers.

As soon, however, as Gerlach observed that a sinner was struck with compunction, he would assure him that Almighty God is more willing to grant us His pardon than we are to desire or ask it. To a sinner who possesses a deep sorrow for his misdeeds, God ceases to be a Judge, and becomes a loving Father. He forgets what the truly penitent sinner *was*, and considers only what he *is*. Thus Gerlach strove to encourage the penitent and to bring the impenitent from his sinful ways. Whenever and wherever he could promote God's glory he endeavoured to do so.

In scourging the vices of his time, however, Gerlach seemed to forget his ordinary meekness. He waged an outspoken and relentless war against usury and the injustice practised by many noblemen against the poor. The immodest dress of wealthy matrons was condemned in the bitterest terms. "What use," he would say, "can such immodesty serve, save to attract the eyes of adulterers?" Gerlach was, also, wont to inveigh in strong language against the silly custom of dressing the hair in an extravagant manner. This custom was in vogue, even among young men, and it was not unusual for them to spend an hour or more a day at having their hair curled and frizzled. This display of vanity, if not pride, displeased the Saint greatly, and whenever he had an opportunity of persuading a person to abandon this fashion he was sure to do so.

His efforts against this custom were, on one occasion, accredited and seconded by a miracle. A young man living in the vicinity of Houthem finally permitted

Gerlach to cut his hair, in which he had taken great pride ; and, to the great astonishment of the good man, his hair remained short throughout his entire life, although he lived to a ripe old age. Thus, the temptation to have it curled after the foolish fashion of the day was entirely removed. One of his sons, who became a priest, and conducted a parish for many years in a town on the left bank of the Rhine, handed this remarkable fact down to posterity.

In the course of time the report of Gerlach's great austerities and apostolic zeal naturally spread in every direction. People of almost every rank and station in life came to see the greatly-changed knight, and to be edified by his conversation. Others, oppressed by care and afflictions, were wont to come to him for consolation and advice. All were sure to find what they sought. Gerlach would listen to their difficulties and trials with the greatest sympathy and patience, and then pour into their wounded and aching hearts the healing balm of Christian hope and fortitude.

Among others who thus sought Gerlach's counsel and prayers was a certain noble Lady Oda, who was intimately connected by birth with the Lords of Heinsberg-Valkenburg and with Philip of Heinsberg, the Right Reverend Archbishop of Cologne, from 1183 to 1191. Upon hearing of Gerlach's transcendent virtues she decided to pay him a visit, and, as may be well imagined, great was the surprise of this noble lady to see the wonderful change which Divine grace had wrought in her former friend. So deeply was she impressed by the austerities and sanctity of the holy knight, as well as by his heroic charity towards the poor, that she made him a gift of

several farms in the neighbourhood of Houthem. And, in truth, she could hardly have disposed of them to better advantage; for, as may be easily imagined, the entire income was distributed among the most worthy objects of charity.

CHAPTER V.

HE IS SEVERELY TRIED BY TEMPTATIONS AND PERSECUTIONS.

MAN'S most bitter enemy in this world is Satan. There is no place so remote, no state so holy, and no vow so sacred as to preclude temptations. Nay, frequently the holier one is the greater are the trials with which he has to contend. Temptations are not shameful or injurious in themselves. We find that the most saintly persons were, like St. Anthony and the Curé of Ars, frequently molested in the most relentless manner by the powers of darkness. Far from making them despair, however, these afflictions were rather a means for them to attain greater sanctity.

God permits man to be tempted because such trials make him feel his weakness the more keenly, and induce him to flee to his Heavenly Father for protection. Yes, "Blessed is the soul that is purified by temptation, as gold is purified by fire." Also St. Gerlach had to pass through this cleansing fire. Owing to his great zeal and activity in labouring for God's glory he gradually provoked the bitterest enmity of the Evil One, and incurred extraordinary temptations and persecutions. The powers of hell first tried by gentle means to persuade the holy servant of God to abandon his manner of life, but, not succeeding, they persecuted him by all manner of afflictions.

Gerlach had agreed with a certain Hermit Blankhart,* who frequently accompanied him on his pilgrimages to Maestricht, that the first to arrive at a certain cross-road was to wait for the other. Satan, becoming aware of this, would ofter take the form of Blankhart and endeavour, on the rest of the way to Maestricht, to dissuade Gerlach from the path of austerity and holy conversation which he was following. Failing, however, to win Gerlach by his false and subtle arguments, he suddenly departed in a violent rage. On other occasions he would apparently throw all kinds of obstacles into the holy man's way, by conjuring up phantasms of barrels, heaps of stones, and steep inclines in the Saint's imagination. Not content with harassing him on his holy pilgrimages, the evil spirits would frequently deprive Gerlach of the little rest he gave his tired limbs at night. They would imitate robbers, and disturb the Saint whilst resting in the hollow oak, by threatening to fall upon him. As soon as the holy anchorite, however, discovered with whom he had to deal, he rose and put them to flight by making the sign of the Cross, or by holding up the crucifix,† which he always wore around his neck, to view.

But not only by appearing personally and in bodily form did these accursed of God afflict Gerlach. Failing

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* It is very probable that numerous anchorites dwelt in the vicinity of Valkenburg and Houthem formerly. There is still an old hermitage on the crest of a hill in the neighbourhood, where a recluse divides his time between work and prayer.

† Gerlach brought this crucifix with him from the Holy Land and wore it throughout life. It was still in a good state of preservation in the seventeenth century and highly venerated. The author could not learn in whose possession it is at present.

in all his devices to induce this pious worshipper to abandon his Creator, or to diminish his austerities, Satan adopted another plan. With the permission of God he invented a scheme of depriving the holy man of his cell, thinking that he would then be compelled to relinquish his strict manner of life and to take up his abode in the castle. And he soon found ready instruments to aid him in his plans.

One would naturally suppose that a poor old man, abiding in an oak-tree and living on the scantiest food, would enjoy the highest respect of all who knew him, rather than be the object of suspicion and persecution, and this, also, on the part of his own ecclesiastical superiors. But not so. Satan roused suspicion in the minds of some unwary peasants in the neighbourhood as to Gerlach's sincerity and piety. They, accordingly, go to the Reverend Canons of Meersen and charge Gerlach with hypocrisy—"The man is leading a most extraordinary life and acts peculiarly! He has the appearance of a pauper, though, in reality, he possesses great wealth! Who knows what treasures are hidden under the oak, in which he spends so much of his time!" Others expressed their belief that "the hyprocite had taken up his abode in an oak out of a superstitious* regard for that tree."

It did not require much to induce the Canons to convey these reports of some deluded and unwitting peasants to

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* The ancient inhabitants of Germany often attached certain divine powers to the oak. St. Boniface, the great Apostle of Germany, felled an oak which had been held sacred to Thor, the god of Thunder! The timber obtained from it was used for a church which he dedicated to the Prince of the Apostles.

the Diocesan Bishop. They had frequently reprimanded Gerlach on account of his apparent eccentricity, and manifested their displeasure at his following so strange a life. Moreover, as Anonymous states, "although Gerlach was conscientious in fulfilling his parochial duties, it was an object of displeasure to them that he persisted in attending Divine service oftener in other parishes than he did in his own."

The Reverend Canons, therefore, decided to report the case as soon as possible to the Right Reverend Bishop. They carry out their intention, and succeed in persuading his Lordship Bishop Norbert, Coadjutor Bishop of Liège, to have the "hollow oak" felled. The Right Reverend Bishop accordingly came some time thereafter to Meersen, and, accompanied by the Reverend Canons, proceeded to the poor domicile of the "eccentric hypocrite." Upon learning the object of their visit, the poor old man burst into tears. Who knows, perhaps they were tears of joy at having been found worthy to become more similar to his Divine Master, "who had not where to lay His head upon."

The "hollow oak" is rased to the ground. But, to the astonishment of many, no "treasure" is found, unless the illustrious example of Gerlach's heroic resignation and humility in this hour of trial might be called a spiritual treasure for the bystanders.

The good Bishop, upon seeing that he had acted prematurely, was justly roused with holy indignation against the accusers of this saintly knight of Christ, and would fain have restored the tree to the condition in which he had found it. What little he could do to repair his mistake he did most willingly. He gave

orders to have the "hollow oak" hewn into timber suitable for two small buildings, the one to serve as a chapel, the other as a cell for the holy Gerlach. Later the chapel was blessed. and permission granted the holy anchorite to have the Sacrifice of the Mass offered in it. Thus what before seemed a most severe trial now became a source of countless graces to him, and Almighty God rewarded His faithful servant with that sublime consolation which the world cannot give.

The just cannot escape being belied and calumniated by the evil-minded. But the war of the wicked may rage as violently as it will, never will Almighty God permit man to be tempted beyond his strength. A loving and all-powerful Providence rules over all, so that "not even a sparrow falls from the roof" without God's knowledge and consent. Trials we must have in this world, but they are never given us without abundant grace to bear them meritoriously. The sun remains stationed in the heavens, with all its light and life-giving warmth, even though a cloud often hides it from our view. Thus, Jesus Christ, the Sun of Justice, even though He may seem at times, in the dark hour of affliction, to disappear from our view, nevertheless remains at our side, and is ever ready to shed the beneficent rays of His grace upon our soul.

CHAPTER VI.

A CONSOLING REVELATION, AND HOW GERLACH RECEIVES IT.

In the twelfth century, the period in which the life of our Saint falls, there lived a very holy and learned nun, St. Hildegard. She was born at Boekelheim, in the year 1098, and died on the 17th of September, 1179. When but eight years old she was placed under the charge of the Benedictine Sisters at Disenbodenberg, Rhineland, and steadily grew in virtue and learning. Having entered religion she became in the course of time Abbess of the St. Rupert's Convent, at Bingen, on the Rhine. St. Hildegard was one of the most remarkable women of her time, and was consulted on the important ecclesiastical questions of the day by emperors as well as by high ecclesiastical dignitaries. The works of this saintly woman are still read with great spiritual profit. About two hundred and seventy letters, written in the Latin language, which she received from crowned heads and high prelates, are still extant. Besides two biographies, and numerous other works, this illustrious nun also wrote the "Scivias,"* a book containing the account of her visions and revelations. In the year 1147 St. Bernard asserted in public that St. Hildegard possessed

* The "Scivias" is entitled thus "quia docet vias Scientiae," because it teaches the ways of knowledge.

the gift of prophecy; also, Pope Eugene III. gave his approval to the contents of the "Scivias" at the council which was held under his direction in Treves.

St. Hildegard has also a special relation with our Saint, for this holy daughter of St. Benedict was chosen by Divine Providence as the instrument of a most consoling revelation concerning his future destiny. One day, as she was rapt in contemplation on the life of the Blessed in Heaven, she beheld, as she had often done before, Almighty God seated on His heavenly throne and surrounded by an infinite number of angels and saints. Whilst she was admiring this indescribable scene she noticed that amongst the choirs of angels there was one exquisitely adorned throne which stood vacant. Lost in holy ecstasy she inquiringly turned to ask whose magnificent throne that might be? But ere she could put the question she understood by divine inspiration that this throne was destined for God's devoted servant, St. Gerlach, who daily made a pilgrimage to Maestricht in honour of St. Servatius.

St. Hildegard ever after cherished the greatest reverence towards the holy anchorite of Houthem, for nothing could shake her in the belief that God had communicated his future blessed destiny to her. A short time after she had received this divine revelation she sent St. Gerlach the wreath* with which, according to the custom of the time, the Bishop had crowned her on the occasion of her religious profession, "as a token of her high regard, and as a pledge of the future glory which she hoped to enjoy with him in

* This wreath was in possession of the parish of Houthem for several centuries after the death of St. Gerlach (Habets, p. 81).

Heaven." What a consolation this revelation must have been to the holy Gerlach! He cherished the inestimable grace and the gift of St. Hildegard most highly. In his humility, however, he deemed himself quite unworthy of such a distinction, so much so that he did not leave off from his former austerities in the least.

Even after Gerlach had received this extraordinary and consoling revelation he continued, as before, in practising the greatest self-denial. He well knew that works of satisfaction freely undertaken by man have the highest value in the sight of Almighty God. And did not Christ, our Lord and Redeemer, place the greatest efficacy and merit in a life of suffering? Had not He Himself chosen such a life in preference to one of indulgence and enjoyment? Gerlach's boundless love of God prompted him to imitate this Divine example set by Him who, of His own free will, descended from Heaven, suffered, and died for us!

This was the reason why Gerlach continued in his strict manner of life till death. It made him more similar to Jesus Christ, the object of his ardent love, and this was a sufficient motive for his leading such an austere and self-sacrificing life. As a desire of performing severe penances in atonement for the sins of his past life seems to have characterised his former actions, so now the love of God, manifesting itself in suffering out of love for Him, appears to be the most striking feature of Gerlach's supernatural character. Not from a servile fear, nor from a desire of promoting some selfish interest, did our patron practise those heroic acts of austerity and self-denial, but from the strongest and purest love of which the human heart is capable.

CHAPTER VII.

NEW SPIRITUAL CONSOLATIONS AND HAPPY DEATH.

About the year 1169 St. Gerlach became quite ill. For some months, owing to the infirmities of old age, he had been unable to make his customary pilgrimages to Maestricht and Aachen on foot, and hence was wont to avail himself of a mule. Of late, however, he was even too weak for this exertion.

On the last Passion Sunday he spent in this world he was overcome by unusual weakness. Unable to go to the well and get a cup of water to quench his burning thirst, he begged Father Ruetger, the priest who frequently celebrated holy Mass in his chapel, to please bring him a drink from the adjoining well. The latter readily complied with the poor invalid's request and, having brought a cup of fresh water, handed it to him. But lo! Instead of water, he tasted wine! Thinking that his confessor had wished to deceive him, he said somewhat impatiently: "For fourteen years I have not drunk wine, nor any other intoxicant, and now you hand me a cup of that which I have not tasted for so long a time—and that on Passion Sunday!" The good priest, not a little confused at these strange words, went a second time for water; but Gerlach again insisted that this second cup, as well as the first, contained wine, and, taking it to the chapel, he poured its contents at the foot of the altar. Thereupon, in spite of his great weakness, he desired to be led to the

well. And to the astonishment of both "the water, by the power of the Almighty, had for a third time been changed into wine."* This time, however, the holy man drank it with humble and grateful heart, for he understood that Almighty God wished him to take this extraordinary refreshment in his weak state. Such was the provident care with which this faithful knight of Christ was rewarded, already in the present life, by the power of Heaven!

But the saintly old man was to share a still greater consolation before his departure from this world. A beautiful life-size painting in the Church of St. Gerlach, at Houthem, represents the consoling scene which took place shortly before the Saint's holy death. Having received an unexpected and serious relapse one evening, whilst Father Ruetger was absent on a journey, he sent in all haste to Rolduc for a priest. Since this abbacy, however, was about ten miles distant, and he realised that the hour of his departure was fast approaching, he also sent word to the Fathers at Meersen. The Reverend Canons, however, answered that they could not come, "because the Right Reverend Bishop had, on the occasion of the felling of the 'hollow oak,' withdrawn him from their jurisdiction and placed him under the spiritual charge of the Abbot of Rolduc.' †

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* Ter, imminente tempore
In astra Divi transitus,
Hanc in merum vis Maximi
Mutavit undam Numinis.

(From the Office in honour of St. Gerlach, prescribed for the diocese of Roermond, Limburg, Holland.)

† They might have lawfully administered the dying man had they been so disposed, for their reason did not hold good in such a case.

On hearing this sad news, the saintly invalid raised himself slightly, and, in a tone that was audible to all present, said: "I know in whom I have confided and am convinced that He whom I have served will be mindful of the severe penances and austerities I have performed and which have consumed my strength." He had scarcely finished the sentence when a man of grave and noble aspect, clad in snow-white garments and accompanied by a young man, approached the death-bed of the holy anchorite and greeted him in a most friendly manner. He then administered the last Sacraments of our holy religion. After he had handed the dying saint our Lord's Body and Blood, he bade him good-bye and disappeared as mysteriously as he had come.

Some hours later, after he had requested the bystanders to bury his mortal remains where the "hollow oak" had stood, he departed to the kingdom of Heaven on the Eve of Epiphany, January 5th,* 1171. Effulgent with innumerable virtues and rich in merit, he went to take possession of the glorious throne which had been promised to him through St. Hildegard.

From every direction the people now flowed together to get a last glimpse at the deceased anchorite's heavenly features, and to secure some token of remembrance of him whom they venerated as a saint. Great, indeed, was the sorrow and mourning of all who knew him, when

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* The day is certain, although the year is disputed. This, however, ought not to surprise us, since the years in which Saints Peter and Paul were martyred are also uncertain, though the days are known. Each succeeding anniversary was commemorated in an appropriate manner, and thus it happens that the day on which a saint was martyred or died a natural death is quite certain, whilst the year in many cases is less so.

they heard that the "Holy Gerlach" had passed away. They had lost a warm-hearted friend, a wise counsellor, and a noble, self-sacrificing benefactor. But, though they had lost an intercessor on earth, through Gerlach's mortal death, yet the thought that they had gained one in Heaven was the consoling conviction of all who had been witnesses of his heroic virtues. Their belief that their friend was now a glorious and powerful saint in Heaven, and that it was St. Servatius who had come to take him thither, could not be banished from their minds by the empty arguments of the incredulous.

PART IV.

GERLACH, A SAINT.

CHAPTER I.

ALMIGHTY GOD GLORIFIES HIS SERVANT IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH.

Our mortal life is frequently alluded to as a rough voyage to the shore of eternity. And, indeed, such it is. For, our earthly pilgrimage must necessarily be replete with trials and afflictions, because it must needs be a probation which every human being is compelled to undergo, and upon which the fate of his eternal life depends. It is a journey to our future home. To us Christians, the path has been marked out with unmistakable clearness by Him who descended from Heaven to be "the way, the truth, and the life."

But, if Christ bids "those who wish to come after Him to take up their cross and follow Him," He also adds the consoling promise, that he who does so and "perseveres to the end shall be saved." Would that we were able to fully realise the meaning of this generous promise—what it means to safely reach that heavenly harbour and to dwell for all eternity in the blessed home which Almighty God has prepared for His faithful servants! St. Gerlach clearly understood its meaning and, therefore, in comparison to Heaven all things of this transitory world appeared to him as of little or no value.

Some years ago the writer had the pleasure of entering the English Channel on a beautiful summer evening under a serene and cloudless sky. Not a wave disturbed

the mirror-like surface of the water, and the sun, still shining pleasantly above the horizon, seemed to bid us a hearty welcome to the home of our forefathers and congratulate us upon our safe arrival. It was a charming sight to behold the hundreds of ocean steamers and sailing vessels coming together from all parts of the globe. They had victoriously withstood the violence of gale and storm, and were now majestically sailing into harbour. On the wharf were hundreds of smiling countenances eager to greet their returning relatives or friends. What a delight to see and embrace those who had been so long absent!

Great though such a temporal joy may be, yet, compared with that of St. Gerlach upon his arrival at the harbour of the Heavenly Jerusalem it is like the light of a fire-fly compared with the light of the sun! It is short-lived and vanishes with the cause. But Gerlach, having bravely withstood the storms on the voyage of life and avoided its dangerous cliffs, shoals, and whirlpools, had now safely arrived at the shore of bliss eternal, and entered upon a life of never-ending and ever-increasing happiness.

What a flood of delight must have inundated his stainless soul as he heard the words: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant!" "Come thou blessed of My Father, and possess the kingdom prepared for thee from the foundation of the world! For I was hungry, and thou gavest Me to eat; I was thirsty, and thou gavest Me to drink; I was a stranger, and thou didst take Me in; naked, and thou didst cover Me; sick, and thou didst visit Me!"* And what raptures of delight

* Matt. xxv. 34, *seqq.*

must have filled his soul upon being welcomed by his Heavenly Mother, the Blessed Virgin, by St. Servatius, and by the millions upon millions of angels and saints!

If Gerlach's life after his conversion was already in this world one of great interior peace and supernatural joy, infinitely greater is his happiness now. He had participated whilst on earth in the privations and sufferings of our Divine Lord and Redeemer, and now he becomes a partaker in His glorious immortality! For, "he who suffers with Christ shall reign with Him"! Heaven is the place of victory. Gerlach had fought the good fight and gone forth victorious. Heaven is the place where man is judged and rewarded according to his merits. Gerlach had denied himself the comforts and pleasures of this brief life, and now he is satiated with the purest bliss, and his every wish is instantly fulfilled.

Oh, how short and trivial must his earthly afflictions and austerities seem to him now! They have passed away like a dream. For he is in possession of all that is beautiful and good beyond human conception; yea, "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him"! But not only in Heaven did Almighty God glorify His faithful servant. Also the earth was destined to be spiritually fructified by the heavenly light with which St. Gerlach had become adorned.

There was scarcely a doubt in the minds of those pious souls who laid the holy anchorite to rest, that already then he was enjoying the beatific vision. For they had been witnesses of the sanctity of St. Gerlach's life, of his

austerities towards himself, and of his boundless charity towards others. Besides, many had also heard of the revelation which Almighty God had made known to his servant through the instrumentality of St. Hildegard.

However, although the belief that Gerlach had been admitted into the kingdom of Heaven was deeply seated in the minds of all who had known him, still it was to be confirmed by Heaven itself. His virtue and sanctity were to be ratified by Almighty God, and revealed to the world through the wonders He would work in Gerlach's honour. The holy anchorite of Houthem had, during life, glorified his Creator and Lord to the best of his ability, and now, as an accidental reward for his apostolic zeal in promoting God's glory, he was to be glorified also on earth. The scenes of his austere and self-sacrificing life were to be changed into fountains of supernatural life and health-giving springs. An uninterrupted series of Divine gifts was destined to pass through St. Gerlach's hands and to be distributed amongst his devoted clients. Hence the devotion to St. Gerlach received, at its very origin, the approbation and encouragement of Heaven, or rather it might more correctly be said to have been introduced by Almighty God Himself.

For He did not permit the sacred remains of His servant to lie hidden long in the grave, but hastened to have them placed upon the altar for the veneration of the faithful. Some time after the burial of St. Gerlach, wonderful to say, his holy remains were seen one day lying above the grave in which they had been buried.* The earth had given up its treasure. There he lay, with

* *Cf.* the Lives of St. Gerlach, quoted by the Bollandists under January 5th.

the cross which he had brought from Palestine on his breast. Though he had been buried in a coffin, no sign of it could be seen.

The report of this wonderful event rapidly spread from village to village, and moved the minds of all with holy fear and reverence towards the Saint. The holy anchorite's name was on every one's lips, and from all directions people came to behold this divine ratification of his heroic virtue. "There were as many witnesses of this miracle," adds the first biographer of the Saint, "as there were adults in the province." Great confidence was awakened by this miraculous occurrence in Gerlach's power before the throne of God. It naturally confirmed all who had formerly known him in the conviction that he was a great Saint. His sacred remains were treated with the greatest awe and veneration. Having been encased in a beautiful shrine, they were placed upon the altar of St. Gerlach's Chapel for the veneration of the faithful. The Saint's virtues and sanctity were extolled in the highest terms by those who had had the grace of being eye-witnesses of his holy life. The devotion to St. Gerlach had now begun. It spread with great rapidity, and the little chapel soon became a frequented place of pilgrimage.

CHAPTER II.

ECCLESIASTICAL APPROBATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE DEVOTION TO ST. GERLACH.

WITHIN a few years after this wonderful event the little chapel at Houthem became famous as the scene of a large number of miracles. Constantly sudden cures of the most striking nature were effected through the intercession of St. Gerlach and the pious application of the holy relics. These miracles, as a matter of fact, greatly increased the devotion to the Saint. The number of pilgrims to his shrine grew steadily, so that ere long the chapel had to be torn down and replaced by a more spacious church edifice.

The generosity of the devout clients of St. Gerlach among the nobility and the common people soon erected a large and handsome church, which was built over the site of the former chapel, the spot, namely, where the "hollow oak" had stood. A need of hospitals to harbour the sick pilgrims now began to make itself felt more and more. But who was to undertake this noble work? Who should take charge of these institutions, and care for the invalids that would eventually come from every direction? The pecuniary means necessary to carry out this charitable undertaking were soon obtained.

Goswin I., Lord of Heinsberg-Valkenburg had endowed a Norbertine Convent at Heinsberg in the year

1150, and his son,* Goswin II., had also made large grants of land in the neighbourhood of the "hollow oak" to the same community. His grandson, Goswin IV., who at this time, about the year 1200, was Lord of Heinsberg-Valkenburg, applied, therefore, to the Superior of the Norbertines at Heinsberg, Provost Diedrich, and begged him to take charge of the church at Houthem and of the hospitals which the faithful of the vicinity were willing to build.

The latter, accordingly, after having consulted the Diocesan Bishop, addressed himself to the Right Reverend Bishop Guido, of Praeneste, Papal Legate of Germany. His Lordship, recognising the finger of God in the proposed glorification of St. Gerlach, did what he could to increase the devotion to the Saint.† He readily granted full permission to establish a place of pilgrimage in honour of St. Gerlach at Houthem, and to erect hospitals for the reception and care of sick pilgrims. He, moreover, in answer to a petition made by Provost Diedrich, permitted that those of the faithful who had desired the privilege before their death, might be buried near the Church of St. Gerlach. The devotion to St. Gerlach, and the generous proposal of his clients to erect hospitals for the care of pilgrims to the Saint's shrine, had now received the fullest approbation and encouragement of the Church. The work of erecting buildings was begun at once.

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* *Cf.* Habets; also Anonymous.

† In many documents and martyrologies dating from about this time the holy anchorite of Houthem is alluded to as a saint. Already in the year 1202 Archbishop Adolf, of Altona, refers to him as a saint. St. Engelbert, in one of his works which bears the date 1218, does the same (Habets).

At the urgent desire of the laity, and in accordance with the wish of ecclesiastical superiors, the charge of the parish at Houthem, as well as of the hospitals, was accepted by the Norbertine Order.* Accordingly, after the hospitals had been built, the one for the care of male invalids was taken in charge by the priests and lay-brothers of the Order, and that for women was entrusted to the care of nuns from the Convent at Heinsberg. Some years thereafter, the communities at Houthem were raised to an independent Provostship, and the charge of the hospital for women assumed by a number of Sisters who were exclusively of noble rank.

The first members who constituted this community of self-sacrificing nuns belonged to the highly-respected and influential families of Hoen von Hoensbroech, Beissel von Gymnich, Goir, Eynatten, Rochow, Schaesberg, and Schellard. They were, as their predecessors had been, under the spiritual direction of the Reverend Provost of St. Gerlach. The hospital for women remained in their charge for several centuries. Owing, however, to the bitter persecution which was carried on by malignant Protestants towards the close of the sixteenth century, they were forced to seek a home elsewhere. During this stormy period these noble

* The Religious Order of Norbertines, or Premonstratensians, was at this time in a very flourishing condition. It had been founded about a century previous by St. Norbert, at a place called Premontre, in the Valley of Coucy, near Laon, France. This Order was a powerful factor in the Church during the Middle Ages. Originally the Norbertines were Regular Canonists, who united the contemplative to the active life. Since the Order consisted of cloisters of monks, as well as of nuns, it frequently had charge of such places of pilgrimage as that of St. Gerlach, at Houthem.

martyrs of charity were repeatedly thrown into prison. Their convent was plundered four different times, and finally, in the year 1574, the very building in which they lived was set on fire by the robber bands of Ludwig of Nassau.* On the 24th of June, 1575, the few remaining members of this community were ordered by their Ecclesiastical Superiors to go to the Convent of Engelport, near Cochem, on the Mosel. Here they stayed until the storm of persecution had somewhat subsided and new buildings had been erected, when they again returned to Houthem.

The hospital for men was also destroyed and plundered in 1574 by Ludwig of Nassau. This unprincipled man, who had spread desolation and havoc throughout the Maas Valley, was not, however, permitted to enjoy his deplorable success long. A short time after his sacrilegious raid on the religious at Houthem he was defeated and killed by the Spaniards under General Avila, on the Mookerhrath. The damage, moreover, which he had inflicted on the Church and Hospitals of St. Gerlach was of as short a duration as his career of apparent success had been. Buildings were again erected and pilgrims came, as of old, to seek health and strength at this fountain of grace. And, although the devotion to St. Gerlach was somewhat retarded in its development during these disturbed times, yet it could not be abolished from the hearts of the faithful.

After this persecution had passed over, a long period of relative peace followed for the Church in Southern Holland, during which the devotion steadily increased. The church, which had been built on the site of the

* *Cf.* Wesselmann, p. 64.

first chapel, was eventually, about the year 1725, replaced by a much larger and more beautiful one. The parish at Houthem, however, as well as the other Catholics in Limburg, Holland, were destined to suffer another persecution, and that more violent than the former ones. From the time of its foundation the noble sons of St. Norbert had faithfully attended to the spiritual wants of the thousands of invalids who yearly came to this fountain of temporal and spiritual life. However, they, as also the good Sisters who had sacrificed their all to become slaves to the poor and sick, were now to be driven for ever from the place where they had so devotedly served God and their neighbour.

On the 6th of September, 1786, according to the treaty made by Emperor Joseph II. at Fontainebleau, the Sisters were banished from Houthem. They went, accordingly, to Roermond, Holland, and sought refuge in the "Convent Bethlehem." In the year 1792 this city fell into the hands of French Revolutionists, who persecuted the Church with satanic hatred. Much, indeed, had these noble women to suffer at their hands. But the severest blow was dealt a few years later. On the 28th of September, 1796, these "ministering angels" were officially informed that the French Republic does not suffer any convents within its limits. Thus, as a reward for their inestimable services in the interests of suffering humanity, they were compelled by law to go into exile. Such is the "gratitude" of man when deluded and blinded by fanaticism and bigotry.

The Church of St. Gerlach, at Houthem, however, which had been closed by these "Fanatics of Freedom" in 1786, shared a better fate. It was reopened again

THE MINSTER OR "DOME" AT AACHEN.

for the use of the faithful the following year. Before the departure of Father Silmen, the last Norbertine Provost of St. Gerlach, in the year 1785, a large relic* of the Saint was given to the parish of Houthem. Thus the veneration of St. Gerlach's sacred remains has been uninterrupted in the village of his birth up to the present day!

To judge from the immense number of pilgrims that annually visit the shrine of St. Gerlach, it would seem that the devotion to him has been constantly increasing since the beginning of the century. As a stream, rising in the snow-capped peaks of the Rockies, passes over precipices and through rough and jagged gulches, before it can pour out its fructifying waters over the plains and meadows below, so the parish at Houthem has passed through many vicissitudes before it could distribute its life-giving streams of grace among the faithful.

At present St. Gerlach is held in the highest veneration in the dioceses of Cologne, Roermond, and Liège. The Tuesday in the Octave of Pentecost, as well as the 5th of January, is celebrated as a Feast of St. Gerlach in the diocese of Roermond. It is a most edifying sight to see the large crowds of pilgrims that visit the Saint's shrine on these days of grace. It is especially on the Feasts of St. Gerlach that the

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* The rest of the holy remains were translated to Roermond, where they remained till the year 1841, when the Right Reverend Bishop Paredis returned them to the parish of Houthem. The same prelate also introduced several new prayers to St. Gerlach, to be said during the holy Mass in honour of the Saint and during the recitation of the daily Office. They were approved of by Pope Pius IX. and prescribed for the diocese of Roermond, Limburg, Holland (Wesselmann, p. 70).

faithful flow in from every direction to pray in humble supplication for some particular favour at the grave of the holy anchorite. Many hundreds, on such occasions, are compelled to wait till after the services have been ended before they can enter the crowded church and approach the Saint's grave in its centre.

Every Tuesday, throughout the entire year, a solemn High Mass is celebrated in the Church of St. Gerlach, at Houthem, in the Saint's honour. One cannot enter this beautiful church without being transported, as it were, into another world. The entire ceiling, which is without central support and neatly adorned in the Rococo style, is covered by two magnificent oil-paintings of the Ascension and of the Madonna. On the walls of this unique church are ten life-size representations of as many scenes from the life of St. Gerlach. In passing down the nave these excellent oil paintings recall the life of the Saint vividly before the mind, and exert a quite peculiar and elevating influence upon the pious beholder, for they represent a striking instance of the boundless mercy of God, and perpetuate the memory of the heroic virtue and fervent love of St. Gerlach.

These life-like pictures inform us that "God permitted St. Gerlach to indulge his passions for a time, in order that His mercy may one day become the more apparent, and that no man may ever despair of pardon!"* They recall the Saint's life of penance in the Holy Land, and the long years of holy austerity he spent in the village of his birth. These mute works of art seem to emit rays of that consuming love of God which set St. Gerlach on fire and impressed itself on his every thought, word, and action.

* *Cf.* Anonymous, as quoted by the Bollandists, Vol. I., p. 306.

CHAPTER III.

MIRACLES WROUGHT BY ST. GERLACH.

"THROUGH the merits of St. Gerlach," writes his earliest biographer, "and the application of his sacred relics, the dead were resuscitated to life, sight was restored to the blind, the use of their limbs given to the lame and crippled, and man as well as beast was freed from all manner of diseases." He then cites a long list of these miraculous interventions, adding that they were "a few" of the wonderful cures which occurred within the first few years after the exaltation of St. Gerlach's holy remains. It may, perhaps, interest the reader to hear the account of one or the other of them :

Whilst a noble family were spending a few weeks at a villa about midway between Maestricht and Liège, near what is called the Lambert Farm, one of their children, Franco by name, fell into a deep pond and was drowned. After a long and sorrowful search the corpse was found. As may be easily imagined, the entire family were thrown into the deepest grief over the loss of their little Franco. The sorrow of his mother was heartrending to behold; but, being a Christian woman of a strong, active faith, she at once sought aid where it might be found. Amid prayers and tears, she had recourse in her great affliction to the glorious St. Gerlach, and promised a yearly alms should he have mercy on her and restore her beloved child to life. Hardly had she pronounced the vow, in the full

confidence that the Saint would intercede for her before the throne of God, when, to the ineffable delight of the entire family, little Franco was recalled to life. Happy mother! What a joy for the family to behold him, who had a moment before been a corpse, now restored to life and youthful vigour.

Also Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Reynerus testified to two miraculous cures wrought in behalf of their children. A son, who in after life became a priest and lived in Wyck, Limburg, for many years, was taken seriously ill when a child. The physicians had given him up, and believed that his death was a question of but a few hours. The afflicted parents prayed fervently to St. Gerlach for the boy's recovery; and, behold, contrary to the opinion of all, the boy suddenly recovered his former perfect health. Not long after this miraculous cure another child, Alice, was overtaken by a severe illness and soon became so sick that her life was despaired of. The mother, whose confidence in the power of St. Gerlach, owing to similar favours received, was well-nigh boundless, had her sick child brought to the church of the Saint at Houthem. The strong faith of the good woman was rewarded! Hardly had they entered the church and approached the shrine in which St. Gerlach's holy relics were kept, when the child was perfectly restored.

A man living near Maestricht had a daughter who was crippled in all her limbs. Unable to move a step without the assistance of others the poor girl had to be wheeled about like an infant. The father, after having employed all the natural means within his power, had recourse to St. Servatius, the first Bishop and patron of Maestricht, who was then, as he is to-day still, held in the highest

veneration by the faithful of Western Europe; but, as if this glorious Saint wished to further the devotion to his former client, without effect. The stricken parent did not lose hope. He now conveyed his crippled daughter to the shrine of St. Gerlach. Arriving at the church, he wheeled the hand-carriage of his child to the left side of the Saint's grave, whilst he himself knelt down on the opposite side and poured forth the earnest petition of his heart in fervent prayer. His face bathed in tears, the afflicted man begged St. Gerlach to deign to grant his beloved child the use of her limbs. Whilst he was thus absorbed in pious supplication, surrounded by a number of pilgrims, a venerable person, clad in the snow-white habit of the Norbertines, entered the church and proceeded at once to the grave situated in its centre. The father of the sick child, thinking that the stranger was some religious who was making a pilgrimage to this shrine, begged him to please offer a little prayer also for his invalid daughter. The stranger, however, without answering, took a little sand* from the grave of St. Gerlach and strewed it over the lame child. The contracted sinews instantly relaxed. The child, in possession of the full use of her limbs, leaped for joy, and the happy father was well-nigh beside himself for delight. The sacristan hastened to proclaim this striking miracle to his superiors, whilst those who had the grace of being eye-witnesses of the occurrence joined the parent and child in hymns of praise and thanksgiving.

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* Also beneath the present mausoleum, which is built over the grave of St. Gerlach, there are about two square feet of the ground exposed to view. Pilgrims are wont to take a little sand from the grave when visiting the shrine of St. Gerlach.

"But who was the stranger that had worked this wonderful cure, and then absented himself as soon as he had done so?" All were soon unanimous in the belief that it could have been none other than St. Gerlach, who had descended from Heaven and thus rewarded the confidence of the lame girl's father. The carriage of the restored child was left behind in the church in memory of this singular grace. Some years later the father, prompted by gratitude towards Almighty God, devoted himself to His service, and became a lay-brother of the Norbertine Order, assuming the name of Brother Winand. One of the authors of a Life on St. Gerlach says that he received the account of the above miracle from this same Brother Winand, the girl's father.

A young lady living near the city of Maestricht was accidentally drowned. On the testimony of her parish priest and numerous other eye-witnesses of the miracle, she was resuscitated through the intercession of St. Gerlach.

No less miraculous was the sudden cure of blindness granted by the Saint to a woman who lived in the neighbourhood of his former home. Led by a friend, the poor woman came to the Church of St. Gerlach and begged Brother Winand to touch her eyelids with the cross which the Saint had brought with him from the Holy Land. The good Brother readily complied with the request! Hardly had he touched the sightless eyes of the poor woman, when a quantity of blood flowed from them, and in a very brief time she could see perfectly.

Some time thereafter another striking miracle was wrought by means of this same cross, which the Saint

had formerly worn about his neck. A lady from Wisse, a small town in the vicinity of Coblenz, in Rhineland, had been suffering great pain for over three years from a sore foot. The best medical aid was resorted to in vain. Finally, under exceedingly great difficulties the woman made a pilgrimage on foot to the grave of St. Gerlach. The journey homeward was made with joyous heart, and without the aid of crutch or cane.

Not far from the famous Monastery of Rolduc there lived a certain Lady Mechthilda, who was subject to a disease of the brain, accompanied by convulsive stupor. Having confided in the powerful aid of St. Gerlach she was, through his intercession, restored to perfect health.

A child that was crippled to a deplorable degree was one day brought to the shrine of St. Gerlach. The resources of the medical art had all been tried, and long since despaired of. Hence the good parents sought the aid of Heaven. Long and fervent were the petitions they addressed to St. Gerlach for their helpless little one. Their confidence and perseverance were not in vain! Whilst they were sunk in prayer at the grave of the Saint their child received the full use of its limbs. Out of gratitude towards Almighty God the pious parents there and then offered Him their darling little one to dispose of as He wished. God deigned to accept and reward this generous sacrifice of the parents by choosing the child for His service, to co-operate with Him in that most divine of earthly careers, in the salvation of men. For, not long after the miraculous cure, the boy-applicant was received into the Norbertine Order, and was eventually elevated to the dignity of the priesthood. Father

"Matthew" (this was the familiar name by which he was known) died rich in merit, after having spent many years in the service of God and his fellow-men.

In Bloer, a village not far from Tongern, Imza, the little daughter of a widow who was familiarly called "Widow Bertha," fell into the Jecker, a tributary of the Maas, and was drowned. A search of several hours was made up and down the stream, but without finding the ill-fated child. Finally, about five hours after the child had been drowned, the lifeless and deformed body was recovered. The heart-broken mother had recourse in prayer to her beloved patron, St. Gerlach, and promised, should he restore the child's life, to give an annual alms in his honour, when lo, the life-blood again returned to the roseate cheeks of the resuscitated child! The next moment the overjoyed mother had the exceeding delight of again clasping her little darling in her arms as healthy and hale as ever!

In the first biography of the Saint the author continues thus to narrate over forty miracles of diverse kinds, which were done within a few years after the exaltation of his holy remains. And on another occasion he says that "it is impossible to cite all the miracles which were wrought in favour of the sick and suffering by means of the cross of St. Gerlach, relics from the coffin in which he had been buried, or the sand from his grave." "A highly-respected citizen of Maestricht," moreover, "affirms that he knew of an immense number of invalids who had been cured by a pious use of sand from the Saint's grave; owing, however, to human incredulity and the greatness of this number, the author does not repeat it." According to tradition, a similar fountain of grace was

found in the well from which the Saint had drawn his drinking water.

Thus St. Gerlach has, throughout the centuries, continued to exert a most salutary influence in the interests of suffering mankind. No pastor of Houthem, or of the towns and cities in the neighbourhood, can exercise his priestly functions for any length of time without observing the efficacy of prayers to St. Gerlach for the souls of all who place their confidence in him. Great was the beneficial influence which St. Gerlach exerted during life, but beyond comparison greater is that which he now exerts from his throne in Heaven.

In truth, we of the twentieth century need but glance over Gerlach's mortal life, and the countless benefits mankind has obtained through his powerful intercession during the past seven hundred years, to become convinced of the fact that Almighty God directed the steps of St. Gerlach in this valley of tears to the advantage of millions. May the glorious St. Gerlach ever be to us what he has been to countless numbers in the past—an inspiration, a light, a guide on the path leading from time to eternity, from earth to Heaven.

APPENDIX.

THE "AACHENER HEILIGTHUMSFAHRT."

An opportunity was afforded the writer several years ago of participating in the celebrated "Aachener Holy Pilgrimage," which originated during the reign of Charlemagne. Owing to the close relation our patron* bore to the church in which this pilgrimage is held, it may interest the reader to receive a brief description of this unique ceremony. Visitors from all parts of the Continent assemble at Aachen during this time of grace, to do reverence to the rare and numerous relics which are there exposed for the veneration of the faithful every seven years, from the 9th to the 24th of July.

Over a thousand years have flown by since Charlemagne invited Christian Europe to come to the Imperial city and venerate these precious relics. In former centuries, throughout the fourteen days of the pilgrimage there was a constant flow and ebb of Christianity into and from this city, which up to the Middle Ages vied with Rome itself as the centre of Christendom. Every city of Western Europe was there represented, and many thousands in the neighbourhood of Aachen made the pilgrimage on foot. Each nation was allotted its particular district, and thus, although the pilgrims varied greatly in character and custom, the most perfect order was preserved.

As late as the end of the seventeenth century the Holy Pilgrimage or, as it is usually called, the "Aachener Heiligthumsfahrt," was one of the principal events of Western Europe. The Vienna procession of pilgrims from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century alone numbered about five thousand. In the year 1353 the city

* It was to this church that St. Gerlach went every Saturday, on his weekly pilgrimage in honour of the Blessed Virgin (*cf.* Part III., chap. ii.

officials were obliged to bar the city gates against the advancing pilgrims, till the vast multitude already within the walls had seen the relics and were ready to depart. About a century later, in 1446, we read that over one hundred and forty-two thousand pilgrims visited Aachen on one day.

Though the Holy Pilgrimage has not that significance nowadays which characterised it in former centuries, it is, nevertheless, still a time of unusual grace, and is largely participated in by Catholic Europe. The opening of the "Heiligthumsfahrt" is announced by all the chimes and church-bells of Aachen. The entire city is arrayed in festive attire, and on all sides the eye constantly meets with signs of a thoroughly Catholic spirit.

The Minster, the church which forms the centre of attraction during this joyous time and in which the relics are exposed, was built by St. Charles*, whose extraordinary zeal for the spread of Christianity well merited for him the surname of "the Great." It is a spacious stone edifice of the Roman style and has been at various times partially destroyed by fire. The Gothic spire which adorns it was added in 1353. In order that the vast multitude, which crowds every street and by-way in the neighbourhood of the Minster, may see the four "Greater Relics," they are daily shown from a balcony at the foot of this spire. The order of time is observed in showing them; viz., the Garment of our Blessed Lady, the Holy Swaddling Clothes, the Burial Linen of St. John the Baptist, and, lastly, the Holy Linen which girded the Sacred Body of our Blessed Saviour on the Cross.

Promptly at ten a.m. during the fourteen days of the pilgrimage, as the charming strains of *Wie lieblich sind die Boten die den Frieden verkuenden* ("How beautiful are the messengers that announce peace") by a well-drilled choir die away, the Reverend Proclamator appears on the balcony, and in *tono recto* makes the following announcement in German: "The Holy Garment which our Blessed Lady wore at the time she brought forth the

* Charles the Great is venerated as a Saint in the diocese of Cologne.

Saviour of the World will be shown to you. Pray God, our Lord, that we may behold this relic to His glory, and that we may obtain His blessing and grace. Amen."

Thereupon a silk-plush spread is thrown over the balustrade and the Right Reverend Bishop holds the Holy Garment at full length against it. On either side of his Lordship are Reverend Canons who hold the precious treasure in position with ivory rods. Eleven times at different points of the balcony each of the four "Greater Relics" is thus shown to the thousands in the streets below. Every housetop, every window, every balcony within a radius of several blocks is occupied.

During the ceremony of the exposition, the choir, hidden from view and accompanied by an excellent orchestra, sings appropriate selections. The effect of the music wafted forth from that lofty height is inspiring. Whilst the Garment of the Blessed Virgin is being shown for the last time on one side of the balcony, the Reverend Proclamator, on the opposite side, announces the exposition of the Holy Swaddling Clothes: "The Swaddling Clothes in which Jesus Christ was wrapped at His birth by His Mother will be shown to you. Pray God Almighty that we may behold this holy relic to the increase of His glory and to our eternal salvation. Amen." During their exposition the choir rendered the *Adeste Fideles* in a very pleasing manner.

The exposition of the Burial Linen of St. John the Baptist is next announced: "The Holy Linen upon which the body of St. John the Baptist, after he had been beheaded, was laid will now be shown to you. Pray God, our Lord, that we may behold this holy relic to the increase of His glory and to our eternal salvation. Amen."

Lastly, amid the rapt attention of the multitude, the Reverend Proclamator makes the following announcement: "The Holy Linen which our Lord Jesus Christ wore as He suffered His bitter passion and death on the Cross for us will be shown to you. Pray God, our Lord, that we may so venerate this inestimable treasure that His praise may be magnified and His glory increased; and that His passion and innocent death, through which

we are freed from all sin, may continue to be a fountain of graces for us. Amen."

A prayer for the public weal is now said aloud, and concluded with the "Our Father," which is repeated by every one within hearing distance. At sight of the holy relic every hat is removed, and in spite of the immense crowd the greatest stillness reigns. At the close of the ceremony all fall upon their knees whilst the Right Reverend Bishop with the sacred linen, which was once saturated with the Precious Blood, bestows the blessing. Surely such a prayer, participated in by thousands of pious pilgrims from all countries and climes, cannot fail to draw down God's choicest blessings! The unreserved profession of their holy Faith by so many Catholics, the great devotion of the pilgrims, and the genuine piety that pervades the vast multitude, make an indelible impression on the beholder.

The second exposition of the holy relics takes place within the Minster. At one p.m. daily the doors are thrown open to the eager crowds that are anxiously awaiting admission. All the holy relics and costly shrines collected by Charlemagne and his successors are exposed to view and can be seen by every one who has the patience to remain in line. The principal reliquaries are placed in a circular row within the sanctuary. In the centre of this row, at the foot of the main altar, the Holy Garment of the Blessed Virgin is suspended at full length in a large glass case. Chaplains on either side are kept busy touching the precious relic with the rosaries, crucifixes, medals, etc., handed them by the faithful.

The Garment is of an old-gold colour, woven of Oriental byssus and neatly embroidered. It measures 155 centimetres in length and 124 in breadth. A small portion of the left sleeve has been cut off; otherwise it is the best preserved of the four "Greater Relics." According to Nicephorus Callisti, the Blessed Virgin, shortly before her death, commissioned St. John to present this and another garment to two neighbouring friends. Several centuries later the converted Arians, Galbus and Candidus, brought this holy relic to Constantinople, where in the fifth century a special feast on the 31st of August was kept in its honour. Charle-

magne secured it about the year 800 and brought it to Aachen.

To the right and left of the Garment of our Blessed Lady were reliquaries containing the Holy Swaddling Clothes and the Linen which covered the sacred loins of our dying Saviour. The former are of a coarse material and have a brownish colour. They have a spongy appearance. According to the testimony of the patriarch Germanus, they were woven by the Blessed Virgin. Their coarseness would seem to verify the opinion of various authorities that they served only as an outer covering of the Holy Infant. Of their whereabouts during the first centuries nothing certain is attainable. The Empress Eudoxia received them as a gift from Juvenal, the Bishop of Jerusalem, and presented them some years later to St. Pulcheria. Thence, through Charlemagne, they found their way to Aachen, where they have been venerated ever since.

The Holy Linen *(Perizonium Domini)* is coarsely woven and of a yellowish colour. There are various traditions in regard to this treasure. According to the visions of St. Brigitta and of the Venerable Anne Catherine Emmerich, one of the bystanders, prompted by compassion at the pitiable sight of our Divine Lord at the pillar, rushed up and gave him a piece of his tunic. The appearance, however, of this sacred treasure is of far greater interest than its history, for evident traces of the Precious Blood which redeemed the world are still distinctly visible. Carried away by the spell of the moment the beholder falls upon his knees and with a grateful heart thanks his Blessed Saviour for the inestimable grace of redemption.

The Burial Linen of St. John the Baptist is well preserved and also bears traces of the Holy Martyr's blood. A number of smaller gold reliquaries containing the leather belt worn by our Lord, and relics of the Blessed Virgin, St. Joseph, and St. John the Baptist complete the collection within the sanctuary.

We next proceed to a side chapel, where the numerous minor relics are exposed, and admire on our way thither the four magnificent stained-glass windows on either side of the sanctuary; all four were presented by the late

Frederick William IV., King of Germany. A marble slab within the sanctuary marks the burial-place of King Otto III., and bears the following inscription :

OTTONI III.

Quod Atavorum pietas alto aere monumentum erexit, funesta dies fractum evertit. Ars luget dum humile saxum amoti locum occupat.

POS. 1834.

The richly adorned pulpit from which, in the days of St. Gerlach, the learned and zealous St. Bernard preached the Crusades, still occupies the same place it did then. A beautiful mosaic, representing the scene of the "four-and-twenty ancients," who adore the King of kings and "cast their crowns before Him that sitteth on the throne," fills the entire space of the dome overhead. From its centre, suspended by a chain nearly one hundred feet long, hangs the huge chandelier presented by Frederic Barbarossa in remembrance of his coronation, which took place here in the year 1152. Beneath the floor of the spacious octagon which forms the centre of the Minster Charles the Great was laid to rest. In the year 1000 Otto III. found the remains of the great Emperor in a sitting posture on a huge throne, and adorned with crown and sceptre.

Crossing the octagon we enter a side chapel. Here a very large number of relics were exposed in gold and silver shrines, before which a double row of pilgrims were being constantly urged to keep moving onward. The remains of St. Charles the Great were here in a silver shrine about six feet long. It would, no doubt, be of too little interest to mention in detail the costly and exquisite shrines of this collection and their holy contents. Suffice it to say that the greater number of them were presented by the kings and queens who were here invested with royal power. From the time of Charlemagne up to the middle of the sixteenth century, thirty-seven kings and eleven queens were crowned by the diocesan bishop or some other ecclesiastical dignitary appointed by the Pope.

Leaving these holy shrines with grateful hearts for the

grace of being able to participate in the "Aachener Heiligthumsfahrt," we proceeded towards the northern portion of the city. On our way we passed the Rathhaus, which is built over the site of the former royal palace. Heinrichs and Monheims Allees are very beautiful avenues with fine drives on either side of a promenade shaded by four rows of full-grown trees. Bordering on Ludwigs Allee at the extreme north end of the city is Salvator Berg, on the summit of which, beside a neat little church of recent date, the ivy-covered ruins of a chapel built by Louis the Pious are still shown.

We ascend this hill and enjoy a bird's-eye view of the city and its surroundings. Aachen lies in a basin and has with Burtscheid, which it has recently annexed, about one hundred and thirty thousand inhabitants. Its principal industry is the manufacture of woollen goods. The busy city with its handsome buildings, and the charming landscapes which adorn the surrounding hills, presents a most beautiful sight. A few blocks to the west is Mariahilf Hospital, a building of immense dimensions standing in the rear of a neat public park. It is especially arranged for the accommodation of invalids who come to Aachen in great numbers for the bath cure. Even in the time of the Romans the health-giving soda and sulphur springs of this city were annually visited by thousands in quest of health.

Not far to the south of the hospital is St. James's Church, a handsome stone edifice of the Roman architecture. Its façade, adorned with a number of life size statues, presents a rich appearance. A magnificent Calvary scene in stone has recently been erected in front of this church at the head of a principal street. Marienkirche, which up to the year 1872 was under the spiritual direction of the Society of Jesus, is a very neat edifice and centrally located.

By far the most conspicuous church, however, is the Minster. It has an excellent location and forms a centre around which the streets of Aachen run in a more or less circular direction. What a rich history connected with this venerable old church! What a grand monument to the memory of him whose valour as a hero against the heathen Saxons was only eclipsed by his

combats as a Saint against the powers of darkness! With pleasant memories of what we there beheld, we descend Salvator Berg and join the crowds of departing pilgrims that are wending their way towards the railway station.

O.A.M.D.G.

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